

The Pre-War Life and Military Career of Douglas Haig

Gerard J. De Groot

Ph.D.

University of Edinburgh



## Table of Contents:

Abstract of Thesis .....	2
Declaration .....	3
Preface .....	4
A Note on the Sources .....	6
List of Abbreviations .....	7
Introduction .....	8
Chapter I: Early Life, 1861-1879 .....	20
Chapter II: Oxford, 1879-1883 .....	41
Chapter III: The Young Soldier, 1883-1892 .....	66
Chapter IV: The Staff College, 1892-1897 .....	98
Chapter V: The Sudan Campaign, 1897-1898 .....	142
Chapter VI: The Boer War, 1898-1902 .....	175
Chapter VII: The Cavalry Reaction, 1902-1906 .....	232
Chapter VIII: Haig at the War Office, 1906-1909 .....	269
Chapter IX: On the Eve of War, 1909-1914 .....	321
Epilogue: The Great War .....	357
Bibliography .....	376

## Maps:

The War in the Sudan .....	143
The War in South Africa .....	176

## Abstract of Thesis:

The existing biographies of Haig pay little attention to his pre-war life. This thesis attempts to correct this deficiency. The aim is to offer a complete picture of Haig on the eve of war and to show how his development was shaped by personal, professional and social factors. The thesis has relied mainly on material from the Haig Papers, with additional evidence taken from the manuscripts of Haig's contemporaries.

The introduction reviews the existing studies of Haig and discusses the deficiencies of these. The need for a new approach is outlined.

Chapter I covers the period from 1861-1879, and deals with Haig's childhood, family background and education, up to and including the period at Clifton. Special emphasis is given to Haig's important relationship with his mother.

Chapter II covers the period 1879-1883, when Haig was at Oxford. It analyses the education he received, the life he led and his eventual decision to join the Army.

Chapter III deals with the period 1883-1892. It begins with Haig at Sandhurst, and examines the training he received. The remainder of the chapter covers Haig's period as a 7th Hussar, most of which was spent in India. A brief examination of the Victorian Army and in particular the cavalry is included in the chapter.

Chapter IV covers the period 1892-1897. Haig left India to compete for the Staff College, but failed the entrance examination. He lobbied to gain entry and was finally admitted in 1896. The chapter analyses the quality and relevance of the training he received during his two years at the College.

Chapter V deals with the Sudan Campaign (1897-1898), Haig's first experience of active service. It shows how the experience in the Sudan, though not a positive one for the cavalry, did not alter Haig's faith in the arm.

Chapter VI covers the Boer War (1898-1902). This is the most important chapter in the thesis because, as a result of the war, Haig's faith in the cavalry became rigid. The Boer War was the terminus of Haig's development as a soldier; his strategical and tactical beliefs underwent no significant change after 1902.

Chapter VII covers 1902-1906, when Haig was Inspector General of Cavalry in India. His development as a soldier now complete, the focus of the thesis is shifted to the consolidation of his position within the Army and to the influential people who aided this consolidation.

Chapter VIII deals with 1906-1909, when Haig assisted R. B. Haldane in the program of Army reform. The chapter analyses Haig's contribution to reform. His continued rise, professionally and socially, is charted.

Chapter IX covers the period 1909-1914, and focuses on Haig's further rise within the Army. The first two years were spent in India as Chief of Staff, the last two at Aldershot as 1st Corps Commander. Haig's role in the events leading up to the despatch of the B.E.F. for France is studied.

The final chapter is an epilogue. A brief summary of the rest of Haig's life is provided. The chapter then shifts to an analysis of the challenges presented by the Great War and examines Haig's ability (based on his pre-war record) to meet them.

DECLARATION:

This is to certify that the thesis has been composed and researched entirely by the undersigned.

Signed:

Gerard J. DeGroot



## Preface--

The massive collection of Haig Papers in the National Library of Scotland leads one to believe that Haig must have had a 'sense of history'. From a very early age, he appears to have had a conception of himself as a man of destiny, which led him to preserve a record of his inexorable progress upwards. One's first impression on encountering the collection is that it is a biography waiting to be written. It is possible to accurately describe Haig's course in life, starting from a very early age. The second impression one has is a sense of wonder over why such a biography has not been written--why historians have preferred the mythical images of Haig to the record he has left. What follows is an attempt to use the collection to reveal the man.

Three methodological notes need to be mentioned. It should be emphasised at the outset that the quotations from Haig's own writings are the closest possible approximations of the original sources. Haig, as will be seen, had chronic difficulties with punctuation, grammar, syntax and spelling. He used punctuation marks which were his own creation and which therefore cannot be reproduced on a typewriter. His spelling of words often differed from sentence to sentence. Capitalisation was apparently an indicator of the importance Haig gave to things. For instance, 'Cavalry' was almost always capitalised, while 'infantry' and 'artillery' seldom received the honour. Rather than employing masses of 'sics', I have decided to leave Haig's expression virtually alone. Mistakes can therefore be assumed to have been his, and not mine. The same caution applies to the other members of the Haig family.

The second note concerns the use of the word 'moral'. As will be seen, Haig uses this word, both as an adjective and as a noun, in a similar fashion to the way in which 'morale' is used today. For instance, he often wrote of the cavalry as being a 'moral weapon'. To substitute

'morale' in all cases where Haig would have used 'moral' would be clumsy and confusing. It is therefore my intention to temporarily revive the somewhat obsolete usage of 'moral'.

The third note concerns the subject of military rank. As the rank of a soldier continually changes throughout the course of his career, it can be confusing to repeatedly mention it. The rank of a person will therefore only be given when it is, in itself, important to the matter being discussed: i.e. when Captain Haig criticised Field Marshal Roberts.

Finally, rather than extending my thanks to those who have assisted in the preparation of this thesis by mentioning them here, I have employed a more personal and private method. This thesis could not have been completed without the guidance, criticism and especially encouragement of a few very special individuals. The reader should rest assured that my deepest gratitude has been expressed to those concerned.

### A Note on the Sources:

In researching this thesis, the attempt has been made to rely as much as possible on primary sources. In some cases, however, the relevant sources have not been available. Perhaps the most important of these are the official Army records pertaining to Haig's career. These will unfortunately not be available until one hundred years after the date of the particular report. This has meant that, since Haig entered the Army in 1883, not even the earliest records could be secured.

A second important source which could not be tapped was the papers of Sir Evelyn Wood which are in the library of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. A large amount of correspondence to and from Wood is, however, contained in the Haig, Kitchener and Roberts collections.

The letters from Lady Haig to her husband were destroyed by her after the Great War, as she thought them to be of no value. The Haig collection does contain a large file of letters collected by her from persons who had memories of him. It is, however, safe to assume that she destroyed any that cast him in a less than glowing light. All the Great War letters from Lieutenant General Sir John Davidson to his wife were destroyed by the latter.

The originals of some letters quoted by Haig's biographers could not be found, due probably to the disorganised state in which the entire collection is kept at the National Library of Scotland. In these instances, the letters have been quoted directly from the particular biographies.



## List of Abbreviations

A.A.G.	Assistant Adjutant General
A.D.C.	Aide de Camp
A.G.	Adjutant General
B.	Brigade
B.E.F.	British Expeditionary Force
C.-N.-C.	Commander-in-Chief.
C. of S.	Chief of Staff
C.S.O.	Chief Staff Officer
D.A.A.G.	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
D.M.T.	Director (Directorate) of Military Training
D.S.D.	Director (Directorate) of Staff Duties
F.M.	Field Marshal
<u>F.S.R.</u>	Field Service Regulations
G.H.Q.	General Headquarters
G.O.C.	General Officer Commanding
G.S.	General Staff
G.S.O.	General Staff Officer
I.G.	Inspector General
I.L.H.	Imperial Light Horse
M.I.	Mounted Infantry
N.C.O.	Non-Commissioned Officer
N.L.S.	National Library of Scotland
p.s.c.	passed Staff College
R.A.	Royal Artillery
R.E.	Royal Engineers
R.U.S.I.	Royal United Services Institute
T.A.R.F.A.	Territorial and Reserve Forces Act



## INTRODUCTION

Douglas Haig's name will forever be synonymous with the 60,000 casualties on the first day of the Somme and the 400,000 muddy victims of Passchendaele. Unlike any other British general, Haig has been judged more by the length of his casualty lists than by the outcome of his campaigns. The terrible loss of life has been interpreted either as the burden he had to bear or the guilt he should shoulder.

The middle ground in the Haig debate is sparsely populated. Disagreement over Haig's responsibility for the enormous number of British casualties in the Great War has polarised opinion among historians. One side has studied the casualty figures and the characteristics of the fighting and blamed Haig, the commander of ultimate responsibility. These historians have suggested strategic and tactical alternatives which they believe would have resulted in victory at a lower cost of life. They have labelled Haig as obstinate, indifferent, unimaginative or incompetent for failing to recognise these alternatives. The other side studied Haig and found what they felt to be an able commander. They were also impressed by his steadfast courage, devotion and patriotism; and by the principles and values which guided him. These qualities and his ability made him a hero in the traditional mould of British military commanders. With a man of such stature, it was natural to blame the nature of warfare at the time of Haig's command for the tragically high casualties. Haig seemed all the more heroic for his ability to endure this ghastly war.

The passage of time brought a hardening of attitudes toward Haig. The gap between the two sides now seems unbridgeable. Each side relies upon standards--of human conduct and of war--which the other side does not honour. The argument now bears little relation to the man himself. The pattern of Haig's life and his development as a

soldier has been ignored in the determined effort to damn or ennoble him.

The case for Haig has been argued mainly by his biographers. It is curious that, despite the controversy which surrounds Haig, a biography critical of him has not been written. In all, eleven books have been published which could be loosely classified as biographies of Haig. The first two studies, published after Haig's death in 1928 by George Arthur and Ernest Protheroe,<sup>1</sup> were clearly intended as tributes to a fallen hero. Scantily researched and overly romantic, they are of little value to a serious study of Haig.

The official biography, Haig, by Alfred Duff Cooper, was published in 1936.<sup>2</sup> It was delayed because Lady Haig had difficulty finding an author to agree to her stipulation that she would control access to her husband's papers and would reserve the right of censorship. Her first and second choices, James Edmonds and J. H. Boraston, were both 'too busy'. She then asked Sir Frederick Maurice, who initially agreed to undertake the work, but soon found her restrictions intolerable. She reluctantly asked Duff Cooper, for whom she had little trust. His task was made slightly easier by her subsequent nervous collapse, which rendered her unable to pursue the role of censor as diligently as she might have wished. It is with Lady Haig in mind that Duff Cooper's work should be judged. The restrictions which she imposed and the general nuisance which she made of herself make the publication of the book itself an act of heroism. It remains the most complete treatment of Haig's life. Though it does little to alter the heroic image of Haig, there are occasional hints of a frustrated

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<sup>1</sup>George Arthur, Lord Haig, (London: Heinemann, 1928) and Ernest Protheroe, Earl Haig (London: Hutchinson, 1928).

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Duff Cooper, Haig, (London: Faber and Faber, 1936).



author unable to expose his subject's flaws. Yet even this sanitised version was not acceptable to Lady Haig, who referred to it as a 'vandalism' which 'slandered my husband's name'.<sup>1</sup>

Lady Haig was able to delay for approximately two years the publication of Duff Cooper's 'vile book'. Her indignation inspired her to write a book of her own, which she hoped would precede the release and therefore neutralise the effect of Haig. But the publication of her book was stopped when an interim edict was filed by Faber and Faber, publishers of Haig. It was ruled that it would be a breach of contract if she released her book before Duff Cooper's. Lady Haig's The Man I Knew<sup>2</sup>--the glowing tribute to her husband which she had hoped the official biography would be--followed the publication of Haig by a few months. A comparison of her book and the diaries and letters of her husband reveals that she actually knew very little about him, or was conveniently blind to his faults. The book is nevertheless useful for the anecdotes peculiar to her and for the light it sheds on their relationship.

Two other books written by persons close to Haig are useful for similar reasons. These are Douglas Haig as I Knew Him by George Duncan, Haig's personal padre at GHQ, and Haig: Master of the Field by J. H. Davidson, Chief of Operations from 1916-1918.<sup>3</sup> The Duncan book provides valuable information on Haig's religious beliefs, and

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<sup>1</sup>Lady Haig to L. Hore-Belisha, 28 November 1938, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 325(a). Correspondence pertaining to the publication of the official biography and The Man I Knew can be found in volumes 321 and 325. These reveal a paranoid woman who could tolerate not even the slightest criticism of the husband she idolised.

<sup>2</sup>The Countess Haig, The Man I Knew, (Edinburgh: Moray Press, 1936).

<sup>3</sup>George Duncan, Douglas Haig as I Knew Him, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968) and J. H. Davidson, Haig: Master of the Field, (London: Peter Nevill, 1953).



the Davidson study worthwhile material on the command structure at GHQ. Otherwise, the books are of little use. The boundless, blinding admiration that both men felt for Haig prevented a balanced treatment of him.

Field Marshal Earl Haig,<sup>1</sup> by John Charteris, Haig's Chief of Intelligence until late 1917, is, on the other hand, one of the most valuable studies of Haig. Charteris, unlike Duncan and Davidson, was one of the few individuals ever to penetrate within the 'outer walls' of Haig's character. For seven years (1911-1918), he was almost constantly at Haig's side. He knew Haig professionally, and probably personally, better than anyone. This knowledge, when combined with his at times devious wit and his keen sense of human frailties, enabled him to see and expose certain sides of Haig that would otherwise never have been revealed. The book is, as intended, a glorification of Haig. But this did not stop Charteris from raising an occasional eyebrow at his subject. It is unfortunate that Lady Haig denied him permission to consult her husband's papers during the preparation of his book (and then, incidentally, criticised the final result for its inaccuracies). It is interesting to speculate what might have resulted from the combination of personal insight and secure documentation.

After Haig's death in 1928, it gradually became acceptable to question his conduct of the war. The book most responsible for starting the spate of misgivings was the War Memoirs of David Lloyd George,<sup>2</sup> published in six volumes in 1934. The re-publication in a more

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<sup>1</sup>John Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, (London: Cassell, 1929). Charteris also published Haig (London: Duckworth, 1933), a condensed version of the earlier work.

<sup>2</sup>David Lloyd George, War Memoirs, (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1938). This is the two-volume set which will be used throughout this study.

affordable two-volume set in 1938 and the release of the Passchendaele chapter in pamphlet form ensured that Lloyd George's criticisms of Haig received a wide audience. The more favourable treatments of Duff Cooper and Charteris could not compete with the enormous sales and publicity of the War Memoirs.

Lloyd George attacked Haig on a variety of fronts. He saw Haig as indifferent, slow-witted and incompetent. He objected to what he saw as Haig's belief that soldiers were the only persons capable of conducting war. But the allegations which had the greatest impact were those in which Haig was accused of intentionally misleading the War Cabinet in order to continue carrying on the war as he wanted. The memoirs, while informative and interesting, must be approached with caution. They are, as was intended, a personal polemic aimed at exposing the 'incompetence of the trained inexperience<sup>1</sup> of GHQ. Lloyd George and Haig could hardly have been more different. The two men, as a result, found it extremely difficult to understand each other. The War Memoirs reveal this lack of understanding. When reading them, it is useful to imagine what Haig would have written about Lloyd George. The long-term effect of the work is that the author's subjective and at times embellished interpretation of events has, through extensive repetition and embroidery by authors eager to condemn Haig, given rise to a network of half-truths surrounding Haig's command.

The work of J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell Hart--probably the greatest military minds of their day--are worthy of greater respect. Their criticism of Haig's command is bolstered by their direct experience of the war and by their willingness to offer plausible alternatives to Haig's conduct of operations. Fuller's most cogent arguments are

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd George, War Memoirs, forward to Volume I.



found in Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure,<sup>1</sup> in which he skillfully exposes the staff and command problems which undermined effectiveness at Haig's GHQ. Liddell Hart's criticisms were first aired in The Real War,<sup>2</sup> which remains the best history of the 1914-1918 conflict. He returned to the subject of Haig in other books, most notably Through the Fog of War.<sup>3</sup> His thesis in all his works is that a lack of imagination, a blinding optimism and an over-emphasis upon staff loyalty prevented Haig from understanding or adjusting to the unique war. The work of both authors provides the technical foundation necessary to any study of generalship. But, while both authors perhaps successfully expose Haig's weaknesses, they stop short of explaining or understanding them.

The stature of Fuller and Liddell Hart, and the persuasiveness of Lloyd George, overwhelmed the arguments of the early Haig biographers. The door was opened for lesser individuals to pour forth their vitriol. This naturally provoked a reaction from the diehard proponents of Haig, who objected to the sometimes unfair treatment of their hero. The polarisation of opinion mentioned previously became evident in the mid-1940s. After the Second World War, in addition to the works by Duncan and Davidson, three revisionist biographies were published, all aiming at Haig's rehabilitation. One of these, Douglas Haig,<sup>4</sup> by E. K. G. Sixsmith, adds little original insight to the study of

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<sup>1</sup>J. F. C. Fuller, Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932).

<sup>2</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, The Real War, (London: Faber and Faber, 1930). The book was re-published as History of the First World War (London: Pan Books, 1972), which is the edition used in this study.

<sup>3</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, Through the Fog of War, (London: Faber and Faber, 1938).

<sup>4</sup>E. K. G. Sixsmith, Douglas Haig, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976).

Haig, and is therefore not worthy of consideration here. .

John Terraine's Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier<sup>1</sup> is, on the other hand, the most important biography, if only because the author is the most outspoken and articulate admirer of Haig. Terraine's thesis is that Haig, a highly 'educated soldier', did the best that was humanly possible in his command of the British Army. Blame for the war's high casualties is, as mentioned previously, directed at the nature of warfare at the time of Haig's command. Terraine argues that the options open to him were severely limited and that large-scale death and destruction were unavoidable. This sort of fatalism is difficult to counter, since Terraine can provide plenty of proof for his assertions. He rejects as hindsight alternatives to Haig's conduct, and scorns as hopelessly naive protestations over the huge loss of life. Haig becomes a hero, in a sense, through negation--in other words, he qualifies as a 'modern' commander for his stoical acceptance of the intractable nature of modern war.

Terraine did not intend his book to be a complete biography of Haig, but rather a study of his conduct of the war. But this does not stop him from drawing important conclusions about Haig's pre-war career, particularly his eligibility for the title of 'educated soldier'. Terraine's skill of argumentation obscures a reasoning which is essentially a priori. In other words, he appears to have begun with an assumption of an intractable war, upon which he constructs the thesis that Haig was a great leader, which in turn leads him to suppose that his early career must have been full of militarily enlightening experiences. Having concluded in advance that these experiences must have existed, he naturally finds evidence for them. The reader is carried smoothly through a series of logical conclusions all of which rest precariously

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<sup>1</sup>John Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, (London: Hutchinson, 1963).



on the 'educated soldier' argument. While Haig was educated in the general sense, it is necessary to look closely at the quality of his education. As will be seen, an investigation of the resources Terraine did not study reveals the many holes in his logic.

Sir James Marshall-Cornwall agrees with Terraine on the nature of the war and on Haig's unique ability. But because he pays more attention to Haig's early development, his arguments are more convincing. His book, Haig as a Military Commander,<sup>1</sup> is, though unquestionably favourable to Haig, the most balanced study available. While he, too, tends to generalise backwards from Haig's war record, his preconceptions do not lead him into clumsy, impossible arguments. For instance, Marshall-Cornwall is able to see Haig's cavalry background for the impediment it sometimes was, rather than denying that it had any negative effects upon his development, which is the line taken in all of Terraine's studies. Marshall-Cornwall is the most convincing biographer simply because he is the least dogmatic.

A second generation of Haig critics have restated the arguments of Fuller, Liddell Hart and Lloyd George, albeit with much less credibility. Bitterness over the casualties has often smothered reason. Alan Clark's The Donkeys, Leon Wolff's In Flanders Fields and Norman Dixon's On the Psychology of Military Incompetence,<sup>2</sup> all contain unbalanced criticism of Haig. The three authors, while pursuing different theses, are alike in their at times blinding desire to castigate Haig. This desire overwhelms all efforts at honest scholarship. Primary sources are not used. All three authors instead rely mainly

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<sup>1</sup>Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1973)

<sup>2</sup>Alan Clark, The Donkeys, (London: Hutchinson, 1961); Leon Wolff, In Flanders Fields, (New York: Viking, 1958); Norman Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976).

on the testimony of Haig's staunchest critics. With this sort of judge and these sort of witnesses, Haig is naturally found guilty of the most heinous crimes.

Dixon believes that Haig's conduct of the war is an example of military incompetence. Using the psychoanalytical approach, he explains this incompetence as a manifestation of Haig's authoritarian character. Having concluded that Haig was an authoritarian, Dixon then looks to the pre-1914 period for evidence to justify this conclusion. The approach is perhaps the best example of the tendency to make judgements on Haig's character based predominantly on his war record, a tendency which is evident in all studies of Haig. This a priori reasoning is the ultimate consequence of the strident debate over Great War casualties. Behind every study of Haig there is the hidden aim of condemning or absolving him for the loss of life. Few have examined him in a detached manner. His diaries and letters from the pre-1914 period have been used as a convenient repository from which the particular authors have selectively extracted evidence to coincide with their preconceptions. The debate over Haig's command has, as a result, become little more than a sterile contest of the various historians' talents of argumentation.

Haig's character developed before he became a soldier. He developed as a soldier before he became a commander. Because historians have failed to respect this process, distorted pictures of Haig have emerged. There is, therefore, room for a new approach. The study of Haig should begin in 1861, the year of his birth. His evolution at each stage in his life should be examined in relation to the previous stages, not in relation to the Great War or any preconceptions regarding his character. This is the approach taken in this thesis. It begins with a detailed examination of his family background and youth, areas



to which biographers have generally paid only superficial attention. It is important to understand the shaping of Haig's character, because, as will be seen, certain aspects of his personality pre-conditioned the course which his career assumed. Haig's command in the Great War is examined, briefly and speculatively, in relation to his pre-war development--a complete reversal of the approach taken in previous studies. The brevity of the treatment of the war may at first appear curious. But it seems that an understanding of Haig as a person is only possible by intentionally under-emphasising the controversial issues of his command which in the past have hindered such an understanding. This approach also allows the reader to make his or her own conclusions on Haig's war record, aided by the more complete study of Haig's pre-war life which is provided. It must therefore be stressed that the epilogue is simply this author's speculative conclusions, based on an incomplete study of the war and by no means presumed to be final.

With these aims in mind, the available evidence has been examined with an open mind. Haig's life has been treated as an integrated whole. There have been no preconceived notions of criticising or praising him. This has meant that extensive amounts of previously unused material from the pre-1914 period have been discovered and employed. In the past, historians have relied on the easily accessible and most impressive elements of the Haig Papers, namely the diaries and letters to important individuals. The neglect of much of the important source material in the 337 volumes of the manuscripts has contributed to the present sterility of the debate. This thesis delves deeply into these volumes, and also makes greater use of the manuscripts of Haig's contemporaries, and relevant secondary sources. The result is a work which respects the complicated process of Haig's

development and ultimately leads, it is felt, to a better understanding of his command in war.



CHAPTER I:

Early Life, 1861-1879

Though Edinburgh claims Douglas Haig as one of her famous sons, his roots in the city are not deep. He was born at 24 Charlotte Square, a residence used by the Haig children who attended school locally. The actual family home was at Cameron Bridge, near Markinch. Douglas was the eleventh child of John Haig, a Fife landowner whose whisky distillery still bears his name. The Haig family has a long and proud history which is centred on the ancestral home of Bemersyde in the Borders. But Douglas's connection with the main family line was distant. His father was descended from Robert Haig of St. Ninian's, second son of the 17th Laird of Bemersyde.<sup>1</sup> John Haig was thus sufficiently removed from the Bemersyde Haigs to be considered a member of the merchant class, not the gentry. It was whisky, not blood, which initially opened doors for Douglas.

John Haig married Rachel Veitch in August 1939. He was 37, she a beautiful woman of 18. The marriage was a poor match for her. She was of the line Veitch of Eliock--a less financially stable branch of the Veitches of Dawyck. The Veitches also had a long and proud family history, which they traced to Charlemagne. Whatever their financial situation, they usually avoided liaisons with the trading community. John Haig's £10,000 a year income was, however, enough to overcome the disdain of the dowerless Miss Veitch. The marriage was a symbiotic one. It gave him respectability and her the chance to raise children in the style usually associated with her class.

John and Rachel settled at Cameron House after their wedding. Eleven children were born--with stunning regularity--in twenty-two years. Three daughters and five sons survived infancy. When Douglas was born, on 19 June 1861, his father had aged past his 59 years. He

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<sup>1</sup> John Haig was six generations descended from Robert Haig.

suffered from asthma, gout and the ill-effects of heavy drinking. When he died 17 years later, 'abscess of the liver'<sup>1</sup> was listed as the cause. Every winter he spent considerable time at spas in France and Germany, trips which had the ostensible purpose of drying out:

Your father is looking so well this morning he was up before 8. and went out before breakfast. This is the first time he has attempted to do so since he came and this is the first time he has done without Brandy, Whisky or Kirsche before breakfast--really Vichy has acted like magic on your father . . . <sup>2</sup>

The heavy drinking and ill-health had a profound effect upon his disposition. He became increasingly bitter and bad tempered as he grew older. The children remembered him as an irritable man whose coarse language often frightened them.<sup>3</sup>

John Haig's disposition may explain the apparent lack of affection displayed towards him by his children. Like all his brothers and sisters, Douglas was noticeably silent about his relationship with his father. There is little mention of him in the diaries and letters. It does not appear that he was overly grieved when his father died in 1878. A former groom at Cameron House, Thomas Houston, provided a revealing glimpse of the relationship between father and son:

One incident I recall refers to when Earl Haig was quite a young boy. My eldest brother was then groom to his father. . . . My brother was then riding a rather restive young horse. . . . Master Douglas was behind a hedge and when my brother came near he jumped out and startled the horse and my brother had a fall, the horse's hoof catching a cheek and leaving a

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<sup>1</sup>'Notes on the early life of Douglas Haig', contained in John Haig to Lady Haig, 16 February 1930, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 322(a). Hereafter referred to as John Haig, 'Notes'.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel Haig to Douglas Haig, 20 July 1877, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a). All of the following letters from mother to son are from this collection and will be cited as 'Rachel to Douglas', followed by the date of the correspondence.

<sup>3</sup>John Haig, 'Notes'.



mark quite visible now . . . Master Douglas was sent off<sup>1</sup>  
to Edinburgh by his mother till his father had cooled down.

John Haig probably had little, if any, effect upon his youngest son's development. He seems to have taken minimal interest in Douglas's welfare. There is, for instance, only one letter from father to son in the considerable collection of family correspondence. All educational matters were handled by Rachel, with assistance from the eldest son William. 'Willie' was the 'moving spirit in the family'-- in many respects a surrogate father.<sup>2</sup> John Haig devoted his time to various business interests, while Douglas, in turn, usually accompanied his mother on the frequent long retreats to the coast she took for reasons of ill-health. When he was nine, he was boarded at school, and corresponded little with his father after that time. It was possibly to Douglas's advantage that he was able to avoid significant contact with his father.

Rachel Haig, by reasons of her more genteel birth, may have considered herself more qualified to supervise the children's upbringing than their father. It will be seen that she wanted them to adopt the ways of her class, not his. This meant that the father's abrogation of responsibility was countered by the mother's at times overbearing attention. She was kind-hearted, highly moral and deeply religious, and willingly sacrificed a socially active life for her children:

Every morning--winter or summer--she came to the nursery at 4 a.m. to see we were all right! Her devotion to us shortened her life by many years, as she died a comparatively young woman of 58.<sup>3</sup>

She was especially devoted to her three youngest sons: John, George

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Houston to Lady Haig, 6 April 1929, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>2</sup>John Haig, 'Notes'.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and Douglas. The son and daughter<sup>1</sup> born prior to these three did not survive infancy. This meant that a considerable age gap separated them from the other five. They were a family within a family. After Douglas was born, the exhausting regularity of pregnancies ended for Rachel. She could devote herself entirely to her 'three bees'.<sup>2</sup> She was aware that her health was failing, and so was eager to do as much as possible for them in the time remaining to her.

It will be seen that Douglas experienced educational difficulties as a youth. These problems, in addition to the state of her health, caused Rachel to be especially concerned about his future. Perhaps because she felt Douglas needed her the most, he became the focus of her attention:

Selflessly devoted to her children, she loved her youngest above them all, for, with the fine insight of great love, she knew herself to be especially blessed in her . . . little son Douglas.<sup>3</sup>

Though Janet Haig could later rationalise the favouritism enjoyed by Douglas, at one time it was the source of friction between him and the others. Douglas was often<sup>4</sup> mocked and pestered by them. His long blond curls, which Rachel adored, were the subject of ridicule. On one occasion he was held down while the curls were shorn with a pair of horse scissors. Douglas was sent in tears to his mother, the curls wrapped in his pinafore. Rachel was greatly upset by the incident. Upon her death the curls were found among her most precious possessions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>They were born in 1853 and 1855 respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel nicknamed her three youngest sons the 'three bees' for the way they constantly 'buzzed' about her. The name stayed with John, who was called Bee for the rest of his life.

<sup>3</sup>Janet Haig to Douglas Haig, 10 August 1920, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 346(d).

<sup>4</sup>The envelop containing the curls is still contained in the Haig collection in the National Library of Scotland.



The excessive affection was combined with a laxity of discipline. Young Douglas was a spoiled child. He was prone to severe temper tantrums and was difficult for his nurses to handle. Rachel did not discipline him when he misbehaved. Instead, she placated him with sweets or small gifts. Like many spoiled children, Douglas stubbornly opposed his mother while at the same time recognising her as his most important ally. She was his comfort, his confidante, his guardian and his friend in a world which was initially somewhat threatening. She accepted his inadequacies and supported him in spite of them. Rachel was a 'very religiously-minded woman who could believe no wrong in those she loved'.<sup>1</sup> The one she believed in--and loved--the most was Douglas, despite his inability to justify her faith during her lifetime. The combined effect of the excessive affection, laxity and unquestioning support was to give Douglas eventually an over-inflated sense of his own importance, an attribute which, though in time moderated, was never completely discarded.

The above description of Haig's childhood conflicts significantly with the picture presented by Norman Dixon in his book On the Psychology of Military Incompetence. He argues that Haig was an authoritarian, and that this characteristic rendered him incompetent as a military commander. He defines the authoritarian as conservative, conventional, unemotional, reserved, egocentric, obstinate, orderly and mean. In contrast to the autocrat, who exercises tight control when the situation demands it, the authoritarian is 'always tightly controlled, no matter what the external situation.'<sup>2</sup> The condition is supposed

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<sup>1</sup>Emily Haig to Lady Haig, 7 April 1928, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 322(a).

<sup>2</sup>Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, p. 287. The emphasis is the author's. This book will hereafter be referred to as Dixon, Military Incompetence.



to derive from repressive forces encountered in childhood.' In Haig's case, Dixon argues, a naturally aggressive nature was rerouted and legitimised into sanctioned outlets such as 'hard work, a belief in the inevitability of punishment for wrongdoing, and a preoccupation with the concept of discipline.'<sup>1</sup> Rachel's effect upon this process is claimed to have been decisive. Dixon connects Haig's 'military incompetence' with the fact that he was 'an unusually sullen and aggressive child . . . pushed resolutely forwards and upwards by a strict and puritanical mother.'<sup>2</sup>

Haig did exhibit authoritarian traits. But neither his personality nor his upbringing fall as neatly into the authoritarian pattern as Dixon asserts. It will be shown that Haig displayed many characteristics--such as a disrespect for authority--which do not fit the authoritarian model. Dixon mistakenly places excessive emphasis upon his rigid theoretical framework, which causes him to ignore evidence which conflicts with his preconceived conclusions regarding Haig's nature. Rachel did have high ambitions for her son. These may have caused him strain. But neither the ambitions nor the strain were excessive or extraordinary. Rachel was not, to Douglas, a strict puritanical mother. Her precepts may have been puritanical; her raising of him was not.

Douglas nevertheless did adopt many of his mother's precepts, in addition to much of her general attitude toward life. Dixon explains these similarities by arguing that Douglas reacted to the 'heavy opposition from his mother . . . by what analysts call introjection and repression. He incorporated his mother as an idealised authority figure.. . .'<sup>3</sup> Repressed emotions are difficult

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<sup>1</sup>Dixon, Military Incompetence, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

to discover and explain at the best of times. The task becomes nearly impossible when the 'patient' lived over a century ago. The same difficulties arise when attempting to discover tendencies toward introjection, which is the totally subconscious adoption of the traits of another. In Haig's case, the evidence suggests that similarities to his mother resulted from conscious imitation rather than introjection or repression. Douglas spent his first eight years almost completely in his mother's company. There was no outside influence from schoolmasters or tutors. He had few playmates, no close companions.<sup>1</sup> His mother was his most important role model. Douglas admired her and he consciously emulated her:

Douglas revered and loved his mother . . . her death in 1879 . . . was a great sorrow to him, he could never speak of her, but it was her memory that inspired him to do his utmost to live up to her exalted standard of truth and uprightness.<sup>2</sup>

Though some standards were perverted in the process of imitation, the statement is generally correct. To argue that Haig's assumption of his mother's ways was unintentional and subconscious is to ignore the overwhelming evidence of his devotion to and admiration for her.

Regardless of the inspiration, the similarities between Douglas and his mother are remarkable and significant. His natural aggression and resolution mirrored her relentless ambition. Both were self-willed

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<sup>1</sup>This is clear from John Haig's 'Notes', the letter of Thomas Houston, and other accounts left by persons associated with the Haig family. See also the 'Nursery Duties', page 29, especially the rules concerning visiting. In addition, there is a letter from Alexina Nicholson Hunter to Lady Haig (Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a), dated 23 February 1929) in which it is recalled how John Haig would sometimes leave young Douglas with Mrs. Hunter's father, while he (John) fished on the river Leven. "I remember how he [Douglas] used to stand in a circle silently, hungrily eating . . . and when finished scamper off again to 'cuddle' the minnows. We considered the 'wee chap' very quiet and felt very honoured to play with him as he was one of the 'Gentry' to us!"

<sup>2</sup>Emily Haig to Lady Haig, 7 April 1928.



to a degree which made compromise difficult. Both believed in themselves and the righteousness of their ways. Yet both were able to cloak their less admirable characteristics in a 'quiet dignity'.<sup>1</sup>

Rachel and her son--he from a very early age--could cast an image of moral purity and placidity which obscured their darker sides. Religion was an important component of this image. The intensity and sincerity of Rachel's conviction cannot be doubted. But her rigid fatalism did absolve her from ultimate responsibility for the course of events in her life. It was thus a great comfort to her. While she was certain that every man had the power to shape his own destiny, she nevertheless believed that everything, in the final analysis, was the expression of God's will. This meant that misfortune--such as her ill-health or Douglas's lack of achievement as a child--did not erode her steadfast optimism.<sup>2</sup>

Rachel supervised her children's religious tuition and worship until her death in 1879. They recited their lessons and prayed daily in her presence. When Douglas went to school she required that he send his weekly Biblical texts, accompanied by his comments, to her. 'Your wee texts are all safely laid away',<sup>3</sup> she would reply. She constantly enjoined him to 'remember the All-seeing, loving Eye ever upon you my dear boy.'<sup>4</sup> John found her 'perhaps too religious'.<sup>5</sup> The letters of Henrietta and Janet contain no reference to religious matters. Only Douglas mirrored her deep conviction, though even he

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<sup>1</sup>A term used by Janet Haig in her letter to Douglas, 20 August 1920.

<sup>2</sup>This fatalism was especially evident when Douglas failed to gain entrance to Rugby (See page 35).

<sup>3</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 3 June 1875.

<sup>4</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 15 May 1874.

<sup>5</sup>John Haig, 'Notes'.



was, at first, less devout than his mother. He attended church regularly, but otherwise approached religion with moderation. During the Great War, however, an intensity similar to his mother's suddenly materialised. The element of fatalism also became evident.<sup>1</sup> John Haig was certain that this sudden intensity was 'entirely due to the extraordinarily right-minded training he received in his early life from his devoted Mother.'<sup>2</sup>

Another important component of the image of moral purity was the habit of order and cleanliness which Douglas learned from his mother. This habit was later reinforced by every institution through which Haig passed, but its source was Rachel. Though she was in general lax in her discipline of him, she emphasised order and regimentation in his daily life. She had definite, immutable ideas about raising children, and did not tolerate departures by nurses from her pre-set plans. The following 'Nursery Duties' are an example of her attitude:

#### NURSERY DUTIES

Nurses must rise every morning at 6:00.

The nurse must devote her time and thoughts to the comfort and well-being of the three little boys under her charge--cheerily--and happily, always being beside them.

Perfect regularity necessary.

Children's porridge at 8 o'clock. Dinner at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past one. Tea at 6. Lights out and nursery quiet at 10. Children bathed every night--their hair washed once a week--their socks changed twice a day. Clothes kept in good repair--and everything connected with the nursery tidy, and neat. Day nursery scrubbed out every second night--bathroom twice a week, dirty things counted over and mended before the washing on Monday.

Good fire, and everything comfortable for the children on rising--when out to walk they are not to go to people's houses.

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<sup>1</sup>During the war Haig's favourite Biblical text was 2 Chronicles, XX: 15--'Be not afraid nor dismayed by reasons of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's.' See Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>2</sup>John Haig, 'Notes'.

Clothes brushed at night and boots and shoes before they rise in the morning. Nurse has to rise to wash and do up her own clothes. Nurse gets to church every other Sunday.

All children's tempers must be studied--the treatment which is good for one child may not suit another.<sup>1</sup>

Janet once commented to Douglas that the 'Nursery Duties' remind me of your own orderly ways.<sup>2</sup> Rachel's lessons on order and cleanliness were learned exceptionally well by her youngest son.<sup>3</sup>

In the Victorian ethos, cleanliness and order were symbols of moral purity, which was in turn an important component of the gentlemanly image. It was this image which Rachel trained her sons to adopt. Part of the training was a classical education at a first-rate public school. Rachel felt that a public school education was one of the distinguishing features which separated gentlemen from the vulgar masses. Since she was determined to have her sons adopt her ways, not their father's, she paid close attention to their progress in school. Her aims were evident in a letter of 1859 written to one of Willie's tutors:

Our object is not to make Willie a distiller or anything in particular. We desire to develop in him to the utmost such gifts as he has received from God--to improve those intellectual qualities in which he may be deficient and to cultivate his moral powers:--to see him grow up a humble and earnest Christian--an accomplished, well-informed and liberal-minded gentleman--with these qualifications be his lot in life what may, he will command respect and be in a position to derive happiness in whatever position of life God may place him . . . As for myself I attach so much importance to scholarship--especially as an antidote to the vulgarity and narrowness of mind which active commercial pursuits are apt to engender in the best . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The date of the document is not known. It was enclosed in the 10 August 1920 letter from Janet to Douglas.

<sup>2</sup>Janet to Douglas, 10 August 1920.

<sup>3</sup>A schoolmate's most profound memory of Haig was his 'clean appearance'. See C. C. Hoyer-Millar to Lady Haig, n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>4</sup>Rachel Haig to unnamed person, 4 April 1859, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).



Rachel's plans for Douglas were no less bold, as demonstrated in a letter to John:

You must write to Douglas about your prospects--and it will be an immense spur to him in his Greek which he dislikes so much--When my brothers were at school, it was considered that a boy who did not learn Greek was uneducated--and to my idea an Oxford or Cambridge University man is of a higher stamp, than those who are not--of course you . . . mix with men in college who, in the course of a few years will be the great men of the day, Statesmen, lawyers, etc. and the training makes a gentleman!<sup>1</sup>

With her guidance, a gentleman--at least in the Victorian sense--was what Douglas became.

It is curious that, in spite of Rachel's firm belief in the value of a classical education, Douglas's schooling was at first approached in a rather nonchalant and haphazard manner. He received no formal training whatsoever during his first eight years. The reasons for the delay are not clear. It may be explained by his ill-health,<sup>2</sup> or by his behavioural problems. Alternatively, Rachel may have been reluctant to part with her youngest, and dearest, child. He was sent to a Mr. Patterson's school in St. Andrews in May 1869, but this was perhaps simply a convenient place for him while John and Rachel sought cures in Vichy. Douglas stayed with Patterson for no more than a few weeks. There are no records of his performance, nor of his impressions of his first educational venture.

John was at Patterson's school at the same time as Douglas. In October 1869, John went to Edinburgh Collegiate, a small day school located in Charlotte Square, and Douglas followed him. The Collegiate was run by Archibald Hamilton Bryce, a classical scholar

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel Haig to John Haig, 9 June 1885, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).

<sup>2</sup>He suffered from excessive heat rash and, like his father, asthma. See John Haig, 'Notes' and Emily Haig to Lady Haig, 7 April 1928. Emily was certain that he learned to control the asthma through self control, i.e. avoiding activities which brought on attacks.



educated at Dublin and Oxford. The curriculum reflected the background of the headmaster and the educational preferences of the day. In other words, it was dominated by classical subjects. It was here that Douglas's notorious problems in the Classics originated. A master of the school remembered him as a 'clean, well-turned out boy' who was slow and backward.<sup>1</sup>

John felt his brother's educational difficulties had their origin at the Collegiate. It is impossible to ascertain exactly the nature of his problems. He was not of low intelligence. His success in the Army suggests that his mental faculties were not deficient. His early problems were with learning, and probably resulted from his late start. When he began school he was behind his equals in age and was swamped by material which he found incomprehensible. This in turn probably caused him embarrassment, which further limited his ability to overcome his difficulties. Some psychological problems may have resulted, as Dixon argues. But the degree of anxiety he suffered and the permanent effect it had upon him cannot be accurately determined. It seems unlikely that he incurred 'lasting impairment of his achievement motivation'.<sup>2</sup> Dixon believes that Haig's rise to the top of the Army was fueled by his 'pathological achievement motivation'.<sup>3</sup> He defines this as a struggle to achieve motivated by the ego alone. Haig's school days were not idyllic, but neither were they as bleak as Dixon contends. His struggle to achieve was partially, but not completely, ego-motivated.

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Robertson to Lady Haig, n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>2</sup>Dixon, Military Incompetence, p. 250.

<sup>3</sup>See Dixon, pp. 239-243 for a discussion of the various types of achievement motivation, of which the pathological variety is one.

Haig left Edinburgh Collegiate in the summer of 1871.<sup>1</sup> In September, he again followed John to Orwell House, a preparatory school run by a Mr. Hanbury. Hanbury was a skilled and conscientious headmaster who concentrated on preparing boys for entrance into Rugby. Rachel's great ambition was that her sons should be educated at that institution, which set the standards for the cult of Muscular Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Rugby symbolised the gentlemanly values which Rachel tried to instil in her sons. But Hanbury was reluctant to recommend any boy who did not meet Rugby's high standards. Haig, already burdened by his slow start, had little chance of earning his headmaster's recommendation and thus of satisfying his mother's ambition. His time at Orwell House--where he was torn between the depressing realism of Hanbury and the blind optimism of his mother--was his most unsettling educational experience.

Haig stayed at Orwell House until October 1875. His record was consistently dismal. The only surviving report suggests that he was also a difficult child, who had problems concentrating:

Douglas . . . is very backward in Latin . . . spelling very poor and writing careless . . . Rather tiresome at times . . . as he is backward he ought to be more attentive.<sup>2</sup>

Rachel reacted to these difficulties with unquestioning support.

She did not scold her son when he misbehaved, but instead encouraged him to improve. 'Make no subterfuge to Mr. Hanbury', she urged. 'Tell him the plain truth as no good could come of it if you do not . . .'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of this subject, see Rupert Wilkinson, The Prefects, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), Chapters 1-7; and David Newsome, Godliness and Good Learning, (London: John Murray, 1961), Chapter 4. The background information to Haig's public school education is taken from these two excellent sources.

<sup>2</sup>The Countess Haig, The Man I Knew, p. 14. The date of the report is not given. Hereafter cited as Haig, The Man I Knew.

<sup>3</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 25 April 1875.



She cautiously suggested that he might benefit from 'a couple hours lessons of a tutor every day . . . No doubt it would be a great help to you my dear boy.'<sup>1</sup> The same tone is evident in the following:

Mr. H. finished up by saying 'It would not do Douglas any harm if he worked a little harder'--so my own darling boy take the hint and try and work a little harder.<sup>2</sup>

Rachel elevated her son's rare small success to the sublime. She reassured him that he would overcome his failures and that he should not be burdened by them. 'Do tell me how your work gets on', she urged toward the end of his stay at Orwell House. 'Tell me all about it, as there is no one, as you know, whose thoughts centre so much on you my darling Douglas.'<sup>3</sup>

Rachel repeatedly reminded Douglas that 'your advancement into Big School is my great desire, as you know so well.'<sup>4</sup> It is possible that her ambitions caused him some strain, as Dixon suggests, but this was probably outweighed by the positive effects of her continued faith in him. At times this faith caused her to question the irrefutable evidence of his shortcomings. For instance, in a letter to John she admitted that 'Mr. Hanbury tells Douglas . . . it is hardly worthwhile his going up to Rugby as he would be chucked out in a year or so', but finished by writing that she was 'dreadfully vexed at this'.<sup>5</sup> Though she did not make it clear whether she was vexed with Douglas's inability or with Hanbury's low opinion, a subsequent letter to Douglas suggests that the latter was the case:

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 15 July 1875.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 21 May 1875.

<sup>3</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 8 October 1875.

<sup>4</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 15 July 1875.

<sup>5</sup>Rachel to John, 24 September 1875, Haig Papers, NLS; Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).



I think you have a pretty good chance of getting into Rugby . . . the boy you mentioned who 'got in' so high is a precedent I hope and trust will be your case. . . . and Howell, too, being still in the same form, looks as if they were not so particular as Mr. H. would lead one to suppose.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, on 16 October 1875, Rachel indicated to her son that she had accepted the inevitable:

I had a letter last Saturday from Mr. Hanbury writing to know where we thought of placing you, as he could not advise you to go up for Rugby as your knowledge of Greek was so deficient you would never pass.<sup>2</sup>

She did her best to hide her disappointment:

Of course, as you know, I was very sorry to get Mr. H's letter, but then I felt satisfied it was for your good as I had so completely cast it upon God to do for you exactly what He knew was to be for your good, and now I have no more regrets about it if it be for your good. I prayed you might be helped into Rugby, I merely tell you the simple truth and I believe it is well.<sup>3</sup>

It was in instances like these that Rachel's belief in the inevitability of God's will gave her strength. She took Hanbury's advice and enrolled Douglas at Clifton in late October 1875. Douglas again followed John to this school. John, who did not have his brother's difficulties with learning had also failed to meet Rugby's standards, despite similar urging from Rachel. Douglas could probably console himself (and Rachel herself) with this thought. John's failure also weakens Dixon's argument, which relies on the unique problems of Douglas and their connection with his failings as an adult.

In the same month (October 1875) that Douglas entered Clifton, John went up to Oxford. It was assumed by Rachel that Douglas would take his brother's place in the School House. The headmaster, a Dr. Percival, did not, however, agree to these plans. Upon meeting

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 29 September 1875.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 16 October 1875.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and examining Douglas, he decided that he was not sufficiently prepared to enter the Fourth Form. He was not, as a result, allowed to reside in the School House. He was instead boarded with a master of the school, a Mr. Marks, for approximately fifteen months. During this time, Douglas received private coaching from Marks and some of the other masters. He was finally deemed eligible for the Fourth Form in January 1877, at which time he was also allowed to live in the School House.<sup>1</sup>

A record of his achievement at Clifton, from the time that he entered the School House, has been provided by Mr. N. Whatley, headmaster in 1929:

Douglas Haig entered in January 1877. He was placed in the Lower Fourth on the Classical Side. At the end of his first term he was promoted into the Upper Fourth. After two terms he was promoted to the Lower Fifth. Up to that time he had made quite rapid progress. In the Lower Fifth he seems to have slowed down, and remained there for four terms, during which he slowly made his way up the form. He was seventh in the form when he left in April 1879.<sup>2</sup>

In her biography of her husband, Lady Haig quoted school reports which were in her possession:

His spirits run away with him at times, but he is a good honest worker and player . . . a capital fellow both in work and in play. Has done thoroughly well, a capital head of form.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that the Countess Haig culled the best remarks from the reports at her disposal. It is nevertheless clear that Douglas was

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<sup>1</sup>There are no accounts, either contemporary or otherwise, of Haig's time with Marks. Haig's biographers (including Duff Cooper and Terraine) in fact mistakenly place Haig at Clifton from October 1875 until April 1879, while he did not technically become a student at the school until he entered the Fourth Form in January 1877. See Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 4; and Duff Cooper, Haig, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>N. Whatley to Lady Haig, 5 February 1929, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>3</sup>Haig, The Man I Knew, p. 15. These reports are no longer available.



slowly overcoming the difficulties experienced at Edinburgh Collegiate and Orwell House. His record was not brilliant, but neither was it overly dismal. Despite his usual difficulties in the Classics, he passed first in Latin during his final term.

C. C. Hoyer-Millar, a schoolmate of Haig's, remembered him as 'more grown up than the average boy'. He felt that Douglas had 'wider interests'.<sup>1</sup> This comment is similar to an appraisal made by John Charteris in his biography of Haig:

His time at Clifton was short, and he does not appear to have made his mark in any way . . . Neither his school-fellows nor his masters discerned in the boy any indication of those qualities which were to make him an outstanding figure in history. . . . Already at Clifton he was developing that quality of 'aloneness' which was so prominent a characteristic of his later life. He was his own judge, his own taskmaster; he set the standard for himself, and he did not allow himself to be deflected by a hair's-breadth from his intentions or to be swayed by the opinions of others.<sup>2</sup>

The statement above is probably quite accurate. Charteris knew Haig as well as anyone. He did not have access to the school reports, but he perhaps often heard his chief recount his Clifton experiences. Charteris was especially familiar with Haig's stubbornness and independence, two characteristics evident both in adulthood and during the school days. His lackluster finish may in fact have been a symptom of these traits. Haig was easily bored by the mundane and unchallenging. At the Staff College, he was brilliant when an exercise interested him, but refused to apply himself when it did not. The same may have been the case at Clifton. He did well his first three terms, but may not have been bothered to continue this progress.

Some of Haig's other schoolmates at Clifton objected to Charteris' appraisal. For instance, Douglas J. Byard claimed that:

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<sup>1</sup>C. C. Hoyer-Millar to Lady Haig, n.d., (previously cited).

<sup>2</sup>Brig.-Gen. John Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 5.

General Charteris . . . gives an entirely misleading impression of Haig's Clifton days. To me he was a lovable boy, full of grit and by no means lacking in fun.<sup>1</sup>

Byard was one of the few people ever to describe Haig as 'lovable'. He mirrors an attitude shared by many who had but a fleeting glimpse of the man. He may have felt that it was his duty to leave a positive memory of a national hero--as if a great man must have entirely great qualities. Haig, both as a child and as an adult, was sullen and reserved. Even his closest admirers found him cold and aloof. He had no real friends. It is therefore unlikely that, at Clifton, he was uncharacteristically gregarious.

A similar degree of doubt should be applied to a statement made by H. H. Nicholson who remembered Haig on the playing field as being 'active as a cat and plucky as a lion'.<sup>2</sup> It is far more likely that Haig failed to meet the standards of a system which placed a high value on athletic achievement. John admitted that his brother was 'never very good at games'.<sup>3</sup> His later skill as a polo player arose more from his attraction to all equine activities than from an interest or skill in games generally. As his athletic activities at Oxford will be shown to demonstrate, he was too individualistic and aloof to be a team player.<sup>4</sup> He was not overly motivated by school spirit and inter-house rivalries at Clifton. This is clear in Rachel's letters. She linked skill in games with gentlemanly manners, and was therefore distressed when Douglas did not display the requisite level of athletic enthusiasm. She wrote that 'You must try, darling,

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas J. Byard to Lady Haig, n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>2</sup>H. H. Nicholson to Lady Haig, n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324 (a).

<sup>3</sup>John Haig, 'Notes'.

<sup>4</sup>See pages 55-56.



try and come out well at your games so that I may get a pleasing report of my boy.'<sup>1</sup> Games, especially cricket ('a better game than football'<sup>2</sup>, she thought) kept a boy from becoming a 'weakly Cad'.<sup>3</sup> She assured both John and Douglas that 'these grand cricket matches you are having must make you strong and manly.'<sup>4</sup>

Haig spent only two years in the School House at Clifton. His exposure to the traditional public school system was therefore limited. He did not excel in his studies. He hated the Classics. He was not a popular boy. He was not interested in games--the backbone of the system. It is therefore doubtful that the system had a very significant effect upon him. The values of the public school --loyalty, self-sacrifice, manliness, etc.--were only partially absorbed by Haig. It is true that he surpassed the Victorian standards of cleanliness, order and regimentation. But these traits were first taught him by his mother and only reinforced by each successive institution through which he passed. He was not the typical public schoolboy and was not therefore affected by Clifton in the customary manner. Alec Waugh described the usual effect of the system upon the schoolboy in his novel The Loom of Youth:

The average person comes through all right. He is . . . easy-going, pleasure-loving, absolutely without a conscience, for the simple reason that he never thinks. . . . He has learnt to do what he is told, he takes life as he sees it and is content . . .<sup>5</sup>

Such contentment and complacency never characterised Haig.

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 7 December 1878.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 29 May 1875.

<sup>3</sup>Rachel to John, 18 June 1875, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).

<sup>4</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 18 June 1875. The above letter to John contains an identical statement.

<sup>5</sup>Alec Waugh, The Loom of Youth, (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 344.

Elements of the public school ethos can nevertheless be found in Haig's character. They were demonstrated in a speech given to his old school in 1921:

Courage, manliness, truth, clean-living and honest-dealing are the qualities that have made our nation great and must be preserved if that greatness is to last. Nothing can take their place. Cleverness and skill in arts and science are not enough if other qualities are absent.

Tanks, guns, aeroplanes would not have sufficed to bring us victory . . . if the character of our people had been other than it was. In the years that you are spending here at my old school you are all of you building up your characters and helping to form the characters of others. Let your actions and your thoughts be worthy of the burden you will one day have to bear as a citizen of the greatest Empire that has ever taken manliness, liberty and justice for its purpose and ideals.<sup>1</sup>

In his speech, Haig extolled virtues which, it will be seen, were only superficially present in his own character. The speech was typical of him. He could easily preach, but had the common difficulty of following his own sermons. As Charteris wrote, 'he set the standards for himself'. Those he set for others were decidedly more strict. For instance, subsequent chapters will show that he expected subordinates to be loyal and subservient to a degree which he never matched in relations with his own superiors. The effect of his education was therefore more evident in the expectations he held for others, rather than in the guidelines he imposed on himself.

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, speech to Clifton College, 30 June 1921, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 337(k).



CHAPTER II

Oxford, 1879-1883

In the last chapter, it was shown how Norman Dixon's analysis of Haig's childhood and schooldays is flawed. From the evidence at his disposal, Dixon concludes that the period was fraught with anxiety and failure. This, he feels, gave rise to 'pathological achievement motivation' which made Haig capable of handling neither success nor failure. Dixon portrays Haig as a person pushed resolutely forward by his and his mothers unquenchable ambitions. He was, the author believes, a person totally unable to enjoy life. Projecting further, Dixon maintains that the strains of youth and adolescence resulted in an adulthood marred by an inferiority complex, authoritarianism, anal-sadism and, finally, military incompetence.

In the following chapters, it will be seen that Dixon's analysis consists of a series of misconceptions eventually leading to even greater misconceptions. Far from a feeling of inferiority, Haig seems to have enjoyed a comfortable sense of superiority. While he exhibited authoritarian traits, he was definitely not a classic authoritarian. The allegations of anal-sadism are drawn from the evidence of authoritarianism, and are as tenuous. Finally, while Haig may or may not have been incompetent as a commander, it is misleading to treat his conduct on the Western Front as influenced solely by characteristics of his individual psyche. Haig's military personality was shaped by a variety of social, personal and professional factors, many of which Dixon fails to take into account.

Dixon's errors stem from the incomplete picture of Haig's youth which he develops. He had accurate evidence of a difficult childhood, failure in school and an ambitious mother. But the evidence which he ignores is perhaps the most important in regard to Haig's development. Dixon fails because, as shown in the last



chapter, he misinterprets Haig's relationship with his mother. While she was definitely ambitious and puritanical, she was also, more significantly, loving, supportive and kind. While Haig no doubt felt pressure as the youngest in a family of 'achievers', this was more than balanced by the fact that he was also his mother's clear favourite. His failures in school were counter-balanced by her continued confidence in him. This confidence was gradually transmitted to him. By the time he was ready to go to University, he had grown into a self-assured, resilient and impressive young man, able to hold his own with his fellow students.

Near the end of his final term at Clifton, Haig passed first in Latin. In view of his earlier problems with the Classics, this was a very significant achievement. His mother's reaction is indicative of her overall attitude towards him. She treated the success not as something unexpected, but as conclusive proof of the beliefs which she had long held:

Oh! Such pleasure it has given me! Your report! So satisfactory and delightful and to me so true! So true too! I am sure--Very satisfactory! I am very much pleased with the decided improvement this Term. This 'decided improvement' is to me the more satisfactory since your time at Clifton is so short. I should like you to leave the best of characters behind you--and so would you, yourself my darling.<sup>1</sup>

Douglas's success, though long in coming, indicated to Rachel that he was ready to leave school. She had always wanted him eventually to enter University, where the experience, she felt, 'makes a gentleman'. She believed her son was now ready and that any additional time spent at Clifton would be an unnecessary delay to an even more enriching experience awaiting him.

Douglas was not as sure that he was ready for the next step in

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 4 March 1879.

his education. The events surrounding his preparation for University reflect how he was often less confident of his abilities than his mother, and how, when this happened, she gently prodded him. Dixon feels that this caused him excessive anxiety. In fact, it probably enabled him to believe in himself as she did. She refused to allow him to underestimate himself. For example, in March 1879, Douglas relayed his masters' objections to his leaving Clifton:

J. P. does not think I should go to a coach, neither does my form master . . . Percival does not think I should leave . . . as you saw by his letter to Willie. And what he said to me is that one's school time only comes once and when it is over it is gone.<sup>1</sup>

Rachel refused to accept this argument. She replied as follows:

I hope Asquith will inform Dr. Percival of your intentions, as soon as he can, to go to Oxford or Cambridge early, for as Willie says by going early you will be finished early and ready to begin your Profession or Trade at once when you pass--Willie seems to think that you are 'quite fit to pass and go into residence in October'--and 'you have heaps of time' he says to get up for your 'Matric.' and no time is to be lost--'You are not too young' and the time would be lost <sup>2</sup> don't you think, were you to delay . . . going to College.

Rachel's actions were motivated by her abhorrence of idleness, her belief in her son, and her concern for her own health. She probably felt that she would not live much longer, and wanted to see her son safely at University before she died.<sup>3</sup> When he balked, she stubbornly persisted, and finally got her way.

Once the matter of Haig's early departure from school was settled, there remained the choice of a University and a College. Again Rachel

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas to Rachel, n.d. (probably early February 1879), Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).

<sup>2</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 28 February 1879. It is not clear who Asquith was, but he was probably Douglas's form master.

<sup>3</sup>On 12 July 1878 Rachel wrote to Douglas that she hoped 'it may please God to spare me a little longer to my children.'



took charge, with assistance from Willie. 'Willie will write to you as to what he thinks the best',<sup>1</sup> she wrote. Douglas, she advised, should simply

. . . do as I have always done in such cases seek to be directed--and you may rest assured God will shew you--and my dear boy isn't it delightful to feel that you will be wisely directed and that you may rest passive in the matter . . . I trust that you will ask for guidance as the matter concerns much of your future happiness in life and we know nothing can prosper without God.<sup>2</sup>

On 8 March Rachel wrote: 'I think Willie is right in having put your name down for both Colleges and you may rest assured all is well.'<sup>3</sup> Eventually Brasenose College, Oxford was selected. The whole process of Haig's entrance into University illustrates the relationship between mother and son. She gently but persistently imposed her will upon him when she felt he lagged. She convinced him in language that had the greatest effect upon him, appealing to his trust in her and in God. Though she manipulated him, it was benign manipulation, and had his best interest in mind.

Rachel and Willie decided that Douglas should leave Clifton in April 1879 and then go to a private tutor to prepare for the University matriculation examination. John Haig had earlier been coached for the exam by Mr. H. J. Rhoades of Rugby. Rhoades was contacted, but it was found that he no longer took pupils. He did, however, suggest that his brother--'a better tutor than I ever was',<sup>4</sup>--might be suitable. Willie presented this information to Douglas on 15 March:

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 3 March 1879.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 25 February 1879.

<sup>3</sup>Rachel to Douglas, 8 March 1879.

<sup>4</sup>H. J. Rhoades to W. H. Haig (Willie), 16 March 1879, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a).

My dear Douglas,

You see what Mr. Rhoades says. Please let me know if you will go to his brother and read and prepare yourself for College in October. If you will, please go at once and give notice that you will not return to Clifton after Easter, and if it is necessary I will send written notice. If you decide on going to James Rhoades, wire me on receipt and I will put matters in trim for you.

There is however no time to be lost if you are going to a tutor and to Oxford in October. You ought to go to him at once and take no holidays at Easter. Bournemouth would be a nice place for mama to go to but if she were there you would do no work at all.

W. H. H.<sup>1</sup>

Though Willie maintained that the choice was Douglas's, this was in actuality a fait accompli.

The plans were upset by the sudden death of Rachel on 21 April 1879.<sup>2</sup> With both parents dead,<sup>3</sup> Douglas became a free agent. His future was secure no matter what he chose to do. Had he wished, he could have foregone the plans for University, and lived the life of a wealthy gentleman. That he did not do so testifies to the force of his mother's guidance. He was grieved by his mother's death, but his grief did not turn into despair.<sup>4</sup> Her work with him was essentially complete. She had given him the confidence essential to his future progress, the firm base upon which to build his life. Whether he could not allow himself to abandon her precepts or whether those precepts had by this time been completely absorbed by him and become his own, will never be known. The fact is that

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<sup>1</sup>Willie to Douglas, 15 March 1879, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 3(a). Either this date or that of the Rhoades letter is wrong as the latter was enclosed in Willie's letter.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas was unable to see his mother before she died.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas's father died a year earlier. His death is not mentioned in any of the surviving correspondence.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter I, page 27.



he eventually became exactly the type of person she had wished.

Haig did briefly exercise the freedom brought about by his mother's death. The Oxford plans were shelved. He accompanied his brother Hugo on a trip to America on which they visited the principal cities and the Yosemite Valley in California. The trip, a chance for Haig to play the role of the wealthy gentleman abroad, was probably also a time to overcome the grief caused by his mother's passing. According to John, Douglas 'made up his mind to go to Oxford'<sup>1</sup> while in America. The suggestion is that his mother's death caused him to consider foregoing University altogether. If so, his diversion from her directives was brief. When he returned he was certain about his next step. He went to Rhoades as planned, prepared for the examination, and passed it with no apparent difficulty.<sup>2</sup>

Haig entered Brasenose College in October 1880. Though only nineteen, his chiselled features and refined good looks suggested maturity and strength of character beyond his years. He was the type of person ideally suited to Oxford of the 1880s. The fortune he had inherited gave him financial independence.<sup>3</sup> He was able to afford all the pleasures and accoutrements generally associated with the upper class student. His brief travels set him apart from his peers, most of whom came directly from public school. The self-sufficiency which now characterised him did not at this stage cause him to be reclusive. He was a serious student, but not bookish. Though not an outstanding athlete, sports did not matter to the extent

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<sup>1</sup> John Haig, 'Notes'.

<sup>2</sup> It is also possible that he was influenced by the need to leave open the option of an Army career. See pages 63-64.

<sup>3</sup> It is not known what size this fortune was, but it is clear that, after being wisely invested, it was substantial enough to provide him with the comforts he desired for the rest of his life.

they had at Clifton. As will be seen, he was easily able to earn the respect and admiration of his fellow students. He was fully equipped to flourish in the Oxford environment. And flourish he did.

For a young man of Haig's background, Oxford was more like a finishing school than an academic institution. At University, young men of good birth put into practice the lessons of gentlemanly behaviour which they had acquired at school. In other words, they learned how to enjoy themselves according to the socially accepted modes of the day. Intellectual pursuits were decidedly less important than social ones. Haig was no exception to this format. Lord Askwith, a fellow student, maintained that

No dinner and no club . . . deterred Haig if he was not prepared for a particular lecture or essay. . . . His object was to pass his Schools and to pass them quickly and he cut or left a social gathering for his books with singular tenacity of purpose.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that Askwith tried to portray Haig as a more conscientious student than he actually was. In truth few sacrifices had to be made. While Haig did not allow the social life to become intoxicating, neither did he ever become too concerned with his studies. The two seldom clashed. This is evident from the following average day:

I passed the morning drawing and reading in my rooms. I lunched in College with Popham. In the evening I dined at Barton's and Melville's . . . Where was also Lubbock and some others--at 8 o'clock we went to Vincent's election.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lord Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', Oxford Magazine, Vol. 46 (23 February 1928), p. 347. George Rankin Askwith, 1st Baron Askwith, was at Brasenose at the same time as Haig. He later served on a variety of Royal Commissions and was created a baron in 1919.

<sup>2</sup>Haig Diary, 21 January 1883, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 1. All diary quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Nos. 1 or 2, and will hereafter be cited as, simply, Diary, followed by the date of the entry.



The quote is typical of many others. Haig's mornings were usually spent reading; the rest of the day was his to enjoy. Studies were no more than an unavoidable nuisance.

In addition to the required Greek, Latin and Rudiments of Religion courses, Haig read three special 'Groups': French Literature, Elements of Political Economy and Ancient History. These subjects were chosen, and read, with little interest. Neither his diary for the period nor his interests later in life reflect any special attraction to the subjects studied for his Groups. There is nothing to suggest that his reading of them affected his outlook on life in any way. The same can be said of the influence of his tutors. The only tutor mentioned more than once in the diary is Walter Pater, with whom Haig studied Homer. Askwith claimed that Haig attributed his skill in writing English to Pater. But, as will be seen, Haig's written expression was only slightly less clumsy than his oral. Pater's effect could not have been profound. Another tutor was Dr. Heberden, later Principal of Brasenose and Vice-Chancellor of the University. Askwith claimed that Haig and Heberden formed a close personal bond, but again there is no evidence for this in the diary. Haig remained aloof from both courses and tutors. They commanded his attention when required, but very seldom his interest.

The social life at Oxford naturally proved far more important than the intellectual in developing Haig's character. Duff Cooper wrote that Haig's University days gave him a 'sense of his own importance'.<sup>1</sup> No phrase better describes Oxford's effect. It was through his social success that his self-esteem grew to quite

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<sup>1</sup>Duff Cooper, Haig, p. 20.

monumental proportions. Though not himself an aristocrat, he became an accepted member of an aristocratic circle--a well-mannered, agreeable and impressive young man. He put behind him the negative characteristics of his youth--the sullenness, ill-temper, and outward aggression--and became the type of person his mother had wanted him to be, in other words, a gentleman. She would have been immensely proud of him.

His newly developed self-esteem was manifested in his decision to begin a diary. For Haig, the diary was never a vehicle for introspection. If he was ever introspective, which seems doubtful, he left no permanent record of his self-examination. Instead, the diaries are dominated by descriptions of important events in which Haig had a part.<sup>1</sup> The sense of self-importance is evident from the outset. He began by writing:

Having oftentimes heard of the advantages to be derived from keeping a diary I determine to keep one. The difficulty is to have a good day to begin upon.

I think it is well to start with the 19th day of last June upon which day I was twenty-one and put down as many events as I can remember with accuracy which happened from then until this day.<sup>2</sup>

The above was written around the middle of February 1883. Despite his stated intention of beginning on his twenty-first birthday, his first entry pertains to two days earlier, the occasion of a polo match with Cambridge. It is easy to see why Haig began thus:

I got the only goal on our side but we ought to have had several had our fellows backed me up. The Cambridge team got one also, so the match was a draw.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>One common aspect of these descriptions was a listing of persons sitting on either side of and across from him at dinners. It was as if he felt his reputation was enhanced by the proximity of important persons.

<sup>2</sup>1882-83 Diary, frontispiece.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 17 June 1882.



The teams met again on the next day. 'We got two goals, all of which I obtained.'<sup>1</sup> Thus he began in a style which would characterise his diaries for the rest of his life. The diary, though lacking introspection, was nevertheless private. It allowed him to complain, boast or gossip in a manner which would have been considered vulgar elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The first diary covers only a portion of Haig's last year at Oxford. The picture it presents is therefore incomplete. Yet as a tool for understanding Haig's personality, it is immensely valuable. It was the first personal account left by Haig, the first evidence of his self-image. Its importance also lies in the fact that it covers a unique period of Haig's life. Oxford life was dominated by pleasure and devoid of pressure. Competition was at an abnormal ebb. The anxiety caused by Haig's earlier academic failures disappeared. He found real relaxation for the first, and probably only, time in his life. He rode, played polo and cards, attended race meetings and luncheons, drank fine wines and discussed the 'important' issues of the day. In the 1880s, this style of University life was beginning its eclipse. A glimpse of it is available from Askwith's description of his first meeting with Haig. As Haig's 'wine had not arrived', they sat in Askwith's room and

. . . sipped a bottle of claret together. We laughed over our interviews held that morning with Dr. Craddock who had been Principal at that date for twenty-seven years.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 18 June 1882.

<sup>2</sup>As Haig grew older and more famous, the diary and correspondence became noticeably less private. There is evidence that he began to think of future readers. This will be demonstrated in Chapter IX. It is also evident in his war letters to his wife. The early ones began 'My darling Little Body'. After he became Commander-in-Chief this was soon discarded in favour of 'My darling Dorothy' or, simply, 'Dear Dorothy'. See Letters, Haig to Lady Haig, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, Nos. 141-153.



To me he had finally ended by saying 'Drink plenty of port, sir. You want port in this damp climate.' To him he had remarked 'Ride, sir, ride. I like to see the gentleman of Brasenose in top boots.'<sup>1</sup>

For Haig, Oxford was a brief but immensely enjoyable experience.

His diary presents aspects of his character which could only surface in such an environment. More important, his ultimate rejection of the leisurely Oxford life is a clue to his future character and self-conception.

The diary reveals the naivete of these young gentleman who were comfortable in their ivory tower. Outside affairs were seldom mentioned. The important matters were club politics, athletics, and the behaviour of fellow students. When outside issues did intrude, they were usually discussed with a false sagacity, betraying confidence borne of isolation:

After dinner we have a great argument on the present evils of the Church, notably the narrow-minded views of Clergymen and their hypocrisy[sic]. Mac talked loudly but did not listen to our arguments, he was all in favour of the 'good works done by the Church'. Jumbo (Bentinck) listened but said little, Noll stammered out his views on 'Charity' which, he said, 'were never preached to the people'. I must say I thought he had right on his side tho' he could not express his feelings. Something does seem to be wrong in younger sons entering the Church because there is a living in the family and not because they have any inclination to it.<sup>2</sup>

Haig played the mediator and 'finished the argument amicably'.<sup>3</sup> As was the case in similar instances, it was not the subject that was important, but rather the lively conversation that was generated. The young men were role-playing. They sat on comfortable couches, puffed cigars, sipped wine or brandy, and discussed important issues in imitation of their elders.

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<sup>1</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 347.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 18 April 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



Club politics was conducted in a far less amicable and civilised manner. The extensive wrangling and in-fighting betrayed the youth of the politicians (though perhaps politics at any level causes men to act like children). The diary demonstrates that Haig played a central role in many of the political battles of the day. On one occasion an officer was sought for the governing body of Vincent's, a prestigious social club. Haig described the process as follows:

Rather than have a split in the College, I said I had no intention of standing. Owing however to the pressure of all the other colleges and of some of the members in B.N.C. Puxley and his committee decided to run himself and me-- with Ascher as a third man. At 8 we went to Vincent's. . . . No one had ever seen so many at an election. . . . Thanks to Noll everyone had agreed to vote for me! His endeavours were really wonderful, and excitement intense. The result was that I got 65 votes, Puxley 21. . . . This result was due entirely to Noll who really worked very hard. <sup>1</sup>Most of the papers were 'Old Committee and Douglas Haig'.

The result would obviously have received less mention had it not been in Haig's favour. He was fascinated with the struggle and delighted to be involved in it. But his standards of ethical political behaviour varied according to who was victorious. During the previous term a student named Adamson used a similar ploy and in the process kept a member of Brasenose from winning. Haig condemned him as a 'viper nourished in the bosom of Brazenose'.<sup>2</sup>

Vincent's imitated the Victorian social clubs like the Marlborough which were in their heyday. Members met to drink, smoke, dine, converse and be seen. Askwith claims that Haig 'seldom came

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 22 April 1883. Another successful candidate in this election was Sir Edward Grey, later Viscount Grey of Fallodon.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 21 January, 1883. The spelling of 'Brasenose' varies throughout the diary. It will be seen that punctuation and spelling caused Haig a great deal of difficulty, another trait which he seems to have inherited from his mother.

to Vincent's',<sup>1</sup> but again the diary indicates otherwise. In fact, he was an active member of a number of prestigious social clubs. He regularly attended the Vampyres, a Sunday luncheon group where the politics was as fierce as at Vincent's. In his first year he was a member of the Octagon Wine Club, another group which met weekly to play cards, converse and imbibe. He left it in his second year and joined the Junior Common Room, or Phoenix, which had similar habits. Rules of etiquette in all clubs were strictly observed. The members were supposed to act like gentlemen. Those who did not were punished. On one occasion, for instance, Haig wrote:

Had the usual Sunday meeting of Phoenix . . . Puxley made a fuss thinking I had passed the wrong toast. He was fined!<sup>2</sup>

A more serious infraction occurred when a member of Vincent's was caught cheating at cards. Haig sat on the adjudication committee. 'Macdonnell laid down the case in a lawyer like fashion. Rather comic had not the occasion been so serious.'<sup>3</sup> After two days deliberation, the committee asked for the individual's resignation.

One club which Haig particularly enjoyed was the Bullingdon. It was formed to promote sports, especially those involving horses. Haig had, quite literally, grown up on a horse.<sup>4</sup> His interest in equine activities was one of the few distractions he allowed himself later in life. His equitation skills made him a valuable and popular member of Bullingdon. Terraine alleges that Haig did not enjoy hunting,<sup>5</sup> but there is no evidence to support this. He

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<sup>1</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 348.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 16 January 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 29 April 1883.

<sup>4</sup>As an infant, Haig was carried in a pannier on a horse's back.

<sup>5</sup>See Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 21.



seldom missed an opportunity to participate in a hunt, though it is possible that he was attracted more to the social contacts which inevitably accrued than to the chase itself. Haig's hunting skills were important attributes in his social circles. The same can be said for his interest in all forms of horse racing. Though he was not overly keen on betting, he evidently enjoyed being seen at the races.

Haig's favourite equine sport was undoubtedly polo. He was active in the game from his Oxford days onward. It was the only sport in which he was truly expert. The pleasure he derived from it was matched by the pleasure he gave to those fortunate enough to watch him play. More than any other sporting activity, it allowed him to keep an eye open to valuable social contacts. In the Army, it brought him professional advantages. But he no doubt would have enjoyed the game as much had no such perquisites accompanied it. It brought him immense satisfaction. It was in matches that his emotional and spiritual intensity was most evident. Polo was, for Haig, never just a game, but a test of character.

Haig learned polo while at Oxford. He had played the game informally as a youth, but did not acquire the necessary technical skills until his second year at Brasenose. During his first year he followed his mother's earlier expressed wishes and rowed. But he soon found that he was neither physically nor emotionally suited to the sport. His frame was too slight and he 'could not bear the monotony of tubbings or the upbraidings of coaches.'<sup>1</sup> Polo was more in tune with his independent spirit. His talents made him instantly a leader, a position to which he was naturally attracted. Ironically, he was taught the game by an American, Tommy Hitchcock, a highly

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<sup>1</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 347.

talented player who later participated in a number of international matches.<sup>1</sup> While at Oxford, Haig and Hitchcock formed the first polo team in the University's history. In so doing they encountered resistance from University officials who, for no apparent reason, were reluctant to sanction the sport. Permission was finally granted, but less success was met in the efforts to secure a suitable playing field. The refusal to allow the team to play in the University parks angered Haig:

While changing Henry Portman came in to see me. . . . He shows me note that he had received from Jowett about leave to play in the Parks this term. On my return last Friday I received reply to my application of February 24th stating that the Curators could not give us leave. These Dons are very narrow-minded! They gave no reasons of course. How strange it is that everyone should regard the sport of others as stupid and unworthy of any consideration!<sup>2</sup>

Permission to play in the Port Meadow was eventually gained from City officials.

Haig regularly kept at least two horses in the College stables. He spent considerable sums on polo ponies and their upkeep. He required, for instance, a full-time groom, to whom he paid 16/- per week. Veterinarians were regularly consulted. These expenses were only a small part of the costs of his 'education'. He loved fine clothes, though he was not foppish. Askwith remembered him 'scrupulously dressed . . . with his tails showing through a short cover coat, as was the fashion.'<sup>3</sup> He insisted on the same degree of quality in other areas as in his clothing. His food and wine were always the very best. He usually dined out, preferring this

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<sup>1</sup>Haig also participated in some of these, and on one occasion played on the opposite side to Hitchcock.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 17 April 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 347.



to the dismal offerings in the College Hall. In his diaries, he regularly described menus and wine lists for the status symbols which they were. His expensive tastes in all areas must have meant that his costs were considerable, though this did not seem to concern him. Throughout his life he was parsimonious in most areas, but imposed few restrictions when spending on himself. At Oxford he was atypical of the penurious Scots student who, according to the traditional image, was in a constant financial struggle to educate himself. The following entry reveals his attitude toward personal frugality and the possible state of his own finances:

At dinner we discussed the meanness of some fathers to their sons up here in the hopes of making them acquire the knowledge of the value of money--such as the Duke of Westminster to Harry Grosvenor who is obliged to bet a little in order to get some money and Puppy Weymouth who is allowed £300 a year by the Marquess of Bath his father.<sup>1</sup>

Though Haig seldom gambled more than token sums, he excused the practice when it was necessary to compensate for the 'meanness' of one's father.

Haig harmonised well with the type of life he found at Oxford. He found relaxation, friendship and enjoyment at a level not subsequently duplicated in the competitive atmosphere of the Army. He warmed to the admiration of his peers. His membership in the most elite clubs, and his officership in some, is adequate evidence of his popularity. According to Askwith, Haig

. . . knew and was pleasant to everyone. . . but by no means courted popularity. He liked to talk quietly to his neighbour and generally about a subject interesting to his neighbour or affecting the life or athletics of the College rather than his own interests. He was keenly desirous that the community should succeed, and loved to hear of a successful bump on the river or a win of the

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 18 April 1883.

Cricket XI. He loved also a quiet joke but I never heard him make one.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to some of Askwith's other statements, this account of Haig's social conduct was probably very accurate. It will be seen that this statement was echoed by many others who encountered Haig at various stages of his life. Haig possessed a strong sense of superiority, but, except in subtle instances in diaries and letters, this superiority generally remained unexpressed. In public, when there was no crucial issue over which to disagree, Haig had the ability to get on well with others. His attraction lay in the fact that he was quiet without being self-effacing; he was a listener rather than a talker. But while he did not court popularity, he did play close attention to the image he projected. He dressed well, spoke properly and had impeccable manners. He successfully made himself worthy of respect. These talents, which became fully developed at Oxford, were of immense value later in life.

Within Haig's social circle there were a number of men who attained subsequent distinction. Hitchcock has already been mentioned. 'Grey', a fellow officer in Vincent's, was Sir Edward Grey, later Viscount Grey of Fallodon. At least four close acquaintances, R. H. R. Rawson, Seymour Ormsby-Gore, Beresford Melville and Henry Bentinck served in Parliament for terms of varying lengths and distinction. Lord William Cecil, later Bishop of Exeter, and his brother, Lord Robert, were also members of Vincent's and other clubs. Both were men of individual instincts and habits. Haig found their lack of conformity curious. Lord William, 'the Fish', was a 'clever chap' who could 'talk away most amusingly'.<sup>2</sup> But the impeccably attired

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<sup>1</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 348.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 23 April 1883.



Haig found his dress most unacceptable. 'His clothes, poor fellow, are not of the most swagger! In fact very seedy resembling the garb of a scholar.'<sup>1</sup> Lord Robert failed on the same count. 'This Cecil like his brother does not waste much money on clothes. . . . Riding he does not care for.'<sup>2</sup> While Haig displayed an independent and self-reliant spirit, in his outward appearance and in his activities, he stressed conformity. He likewise found it difficult to understand those of different mind.

Women had no place within Haig's social circle. The College and the clubs were obviously reserved for males. But women were excluded from his life entirely. There is no evidence of any efforts or desire to break out of his all-male cocoon. According to Askwith his only outside visitors were family members or Old Cliftonians. The diary confirms this. Nor did Haig take part in the conversations common to groups of men. 'I have seen his face set in silent but obstinate protest, against any loose jokes about women', Askwith wrote. 'My impression was and is that he disliked any remarks derogatory to women, and showed it, without speaking, so clearly that any would be raconteur "dried up".'<sup>3</sup>

The origins and nature of Haig's attitude toward women are not entirely clear. In common with many upper class men of the period, his attraction to the opposite sex was either slow to develop or intentionally repressed. It can be stated with some certainty that he had no intimate relationship with a woman before his marriage. When he finally married, at 44, the time, as much as the mate, was

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 23 April 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 28 April 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Askwith, 'Haig at Oxford', p. 348.

opportune. Before that time (and probably after) he saw women as inferior beings who distracted him from serious pursuits. They were incapable of enlightening conversation. During an 1883 trip to Europe, he was dismayed because 'Women predominate. Such a cackle.'<sup>1</sup> A card game in which these women participated was 'most stupid, but evidently suited for those of childish dispositions.'<sup>2</sup> He harshly criticised men who displayed 'womanish' ways. Haig quite simply preferred the company of men. This was partly due to the fact that he was uncomfortable in and unaccustomed to the presence of women. But his main objection to women mirrored that of his male contemporaries. Women in Victorian society were considered flippant, frivolous, mentally deficient and physically weak. Haig abhorred weakness and a lack of intensity wherever he found it. His rejection of women was a manifestation of this attitude.

Haig's disdainful attitude toward women did not pertain to all women. Three women--his mother, his sister and his wife--were exposed to a side of him which no one else saw. His irrational prejudices against females were not applied completely to them. The sincere bonds of affection which were established with these three dissolved some of the more rigid aspects of his character. Though he could be condescending to Henrietta and especially to his wife, he trusted them as he trusted no one else. His letters to them are the most candid of his correspondence. This is not to say that he was entirely open with Rachel, Henrietta and Dorothy. They saw a softer side of him, but he did not look to them in times of deep emotional turmoil. If he endured any such turmoil, he certainly

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 6 March 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 14 March 1883.



did not leave a record of it. Perhaps in conversations with his mother, his sister or his wife his deep feelings were expressed, but this is unlikely. He was an emotional recluse. Few were allowed to penetrate within the outer walls of his character. No one reached the centre. He appears to have derived comfort and security from this isolation. He may have felt incapable of intimate personal relationships and the inevitable demands which they imposed. This possibility is demonstrated by his relationships with the three women in his life, which followed each other but did not overlap. At no time was he deeply involved with more than one person.

Haig's attitude toward close personal relationships will of course be developed in depth later. It is nevertheless necessary to study the nature and extent of his emotional ties in order to understand the relationships he formed while at Oxford. One of these was with his sister Henrietta. Henrietta and Douglas were not close prior to the death of Rachel. While he was at Clifton, they did not correspond regularly. She was ten years older and had married and moved to Ireland by the age of eighteen. They therefore saw little of each other for the next eleven years. When Rachel died, they were drawn together, each for different reasons. Henrietta had much in common with Rachel. She combined a surface serenity with an inner determination. Her ambition for Douglas eventually became as pronounced as Rachel's had been. Douglas, therefore, was probably drawn to his sister because she was best able to fill the vacuum caused by Rachel's death. But he would not have felt attracted to her had she not displayed a similar desire to be close to him. Perhaps because she was herself childless, she was drawn to her orphaned brother who still seemed to require support and guidance. Their subsequent relationship was more like mother to son than sister to

brother.

The relationship brought happiness to both, but it was especially beneficial--socially and professionally--to Douglas. Henrietta's marriage in 1869 to Willie Jameson, a distant cousin, brought her into the inner circle of the English social elite.<sup>1</sup> Jameson was wealthy, good-looking, fun-loving and, in the Victorian sense, 'manly'. He combined the attributes of the traditional gentleman with a playful adventurism which endeared him to his contemporaries. He was among the most active of the 'idle' rich, earning fame through his success as a transatlantic yachtsman. This hobby brought him into close contact with the Prince of Wales, a devoted follower of the sport. The Jamesons were frequent guests at Sandringham, Cowes and Balmoral. When Douglas came of age and his relationship with Henrietta blossomed, she introduced him into this elite circle. She was his contact, guide, tutor and mentor in the world of the privileged.

Henrietta's presence was especially welcome during a trip through Europe in March 1883. The trip was prompted by Hugo Haig's supposedly serious illness. When Douglas heard of his brother's condition, he took a one month leave from University, and subsequently followed Hugo from spa to spa in a desperate search for the right 'cure'. The experience was an unpleasant one for Douglas. Upon arrival at his brother's side, he was dismayed to find that Hugo was 'not so ill as they made out'.<sup>2</sup> He was quickly irritated by Hugo's malingering nature and the petty quarrels between his brother and his wife Archie. Tears flowed daily. Equally regular were the

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<sup>1</sup>The marriage also linked two great whisky families, though it does not seem that the match was motivated by commercial interests.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 2 March 1883.



'final' marital breakups. Haig's descriptions of this continuing melodrama are among the few comic parts of the diary, though this was obviously not his intent. The 'holiday' left him miserable and bored. He kept busy by studying his French and shopping for horses. When Henrietta later joined him, the depressive atmosphere was relieved somewhat. Together they enjoyed the sights, the food and wine, and the nightly trips to the theatre.

It is possible that Henrietta and Douglas discussed his future career during the European trip. He may have made a firm decision to enter the Army. This is suggested by his new seriousness when he returned to Oxford in April. He may have felt that he had had enough of the leisurely life and decided to leave University as soon as possible. For whatever reason, more time was spent on his studies. He devoted himself to the preparation for his forthcoming exams. Evidently to gain the needed privacy, he moved to lodgings outside the College. The diary entries stopped completely, which indicate that he gave up his social life in order to study.<sup>1</sup> He passed his exams with no apparent difficulty and left Oxford at the end of the summer term 1883. Because he had earlier missed one term due to influenza, he was denied the B.A. degree, since he had spent insufficient time in residence.

Haig's decision to enter the Army probably explains his different attitude toward Oxford and his education when he returned from Europe. A brief explanation of the Sandhurst entrance requirements will illustrate this point. Haig entered the Army before the policy of granting direct commissions to University graduates had been instituted. Despite his three years at Oxford, he was admitted

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<sup>1</sup>On two other occasions, at Sandhurst and at the Staff College, Haig abandoned his diary in order to concentrate on his studies.

on a par with young men straight from the public schools. As a 'University Candidate', Haig had to pass his Oxford exams, but he did not have to earn a degree. He also had to be under 23 years old. This may explain why he did not return to Oxford for a final term. He turned 22 during June 1883. Had he returned for another term, he would not have had enough time to prepare for the Sandhurst exam. The Sandhurst admission system may also be a factor in his decision to go to University in the first place. 'Regular' candidates --those direct from school--had to be under 19 years old. Haig was already 19 when he returned from America. He therefore may have decided to go to Oxford in order to leave open the option of an Army career.

Whatever the reason for his decision to leave Oxford before he earned his degree, there is no evidence that he rued his failure to get one. Oxford had served its purpose as far as he was concerned. He had gained the training which Rachel had claimed would make him a gentleman. More specifically, Oxford opened the doors to the Army. A degree was superfluous. It was not worth the extra time required. More serious pursuits lay ahead, and Haig was eager to embrace them. The reaction shows how much he had progressed in the previous four years. His urgency and resolve were similar to that displayed by Rachel when she pushed him into leaving Clifton early. Like her, he had developed a disdain for frivolity and idleness. Though he enjoyed his Oxford years, he placed unalterable limits on the term of his enjoyment. Enjoyment was a privilege of youth. Haig was now a man. To delay the assumption of manhood was sinful.

Oxford was a stimulating experience for Haig. He matured quickly. Success in academics, polo and society reinforced his self-confidence. Yet despite the fact that Oxford was his first real success, in



addition to the only enjoyable and carefree experience in his life, he retained no fond attachment to the University. He was devoted neither to it nor to its principles. Fellow students with whom he shared many pleasurable experiences were neglected and forgotten after he left. Though he saw some of them later in life, he did not actively seek their company. He took what he wanted from Oxford and then turned his back on it. What he gained was skill at polo, social talents and a sense of his own importance. Everything else was interesting while it lasted, but did not concern him when it was gone. This attitude, it will be seen, was typical of Haig. Throughout his life, most institutions and almost all people were treated in this same unsentimental and detached manner. His major concern was for his own progress and he was never more than slightly distracted from this pursuit.

### CHAPTER III

The Young Soldier, 1883-1892



There was probably no distinct point at which Haig decided upon a military career. His decision to enter Oxford, it was pointed out, may have been influenced by the Sandhurst entrance requirements, but this decision aimed only at keeping the Army option open, and was hardly final or conclusive. There is no evidence of a subsequent determination to become a soldier. Rather, it appears that social, personal, and educational factors caused Haig to drift slowly but inevitably into the Army. There was precedent in the fact that the military was a common career among his ancestors. Each generation since the twelfth century saw at least one member of the Haig line become a soldier. In addition, Haig's education at Clifton and Oxford pushed him in the direction of the Army. This educational system was a traditional source of officers. Haig's temperament, personality and intellectual characteristics made him less suitable to the other careers--the Church, politics, foreign or civil service, etc.--for which the system also prepared young men. When he left Oxford his choices were therefore limited to two: to join the Army or to join the idle rich. Though he always appreciated certain aspects of the leisurely life, he required an intensity and seriousness which such a life could not provide. An Army career was therefore his only realistic alternative.

The seriousness and intensity which characterised Haig after his return from Europe in April 1883 was even more evident once he entered the Army. For many officers, the regiment was similar to a social club; the Army was for them simply a continuation of public school or University life. The comfort and security of the military far outweighed the dangers and sacrifices. But Haig rejected this sort of life when he left Oxford. He approached the Army with an attitude unique among his contemporaries.

Leeson Marshall, an Oxford acquaintance of Haig's, maintained that this attitude was already evident at the University. He described a conversation which took place at a club function:

I said I thought the Army did not shew much of an opening. His chin went out squarer and more determined than ever as he replied: 'It all depends on a man himself how he gets on in any profession. If I went into the Church I'd be a Bishop.'<sup>1</sup>

The authenticity of the above statement might be questioned. Marshall was an acknowledged admirer of Haig and may have fabricated the story in order to enhance his image. Yet it bears striking resemblance to a statement made by George Drummond, who met Haig when both were preparing for the Sandhurst entrance examination:

We were the usual careless lot of youngsters. Haig, though we were all the best of friends, did not join freely in our frivolities but plodded on . . . with his own work, and that he had made up his mind to a serious career in the Army early in life the following incident proves. We were playing Roulette in my bedroom when Haig came into the room. We at once tried to make him play too. He refused abruptly saying 'It's all very well for you fellows, you are going into the Army to play at Soldiering, I am going in it as a profession, and I am going to do well in it.'<sup>2</sup>

Both statements reflect the sense of self-importance and confidence which Haig developed at Oxford. He sincerely believed that he could shape his life as he wished. While this may seem like the usual youthful optimism, Haig was not simply optimistic. He was also determined that his dreams be turned into reality.

Immediately after he left Oxford, Haig took a short holiday in France. Upon his return he began to prepare for the Sandhurst entrance examination. He enrolled with a crammer named Litchfield who ran a reputable establishment in Hampton Court. The use of a

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<sup>1</sup>Leeson Marshall to Lady Haig, 9 October 1929, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

<sup>2</sup>George Drummond to Lady Haig, 10 January 1929, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).



crammer was not a reflection on the qualifications of the candidate.<sup>1</sup> Seventy per cent of all individuals who sat Army exams prior to the Great War employed a crammer.<sup>2</sup> Those who did not usually failed. The popularity of cramming was a reflection on the Army's examination system, and upon its educational programme in general. According to Lord Wavell:

. . . the efforts of the Army schoolmasters . . . were devoted almost entirely to the passing of examinations rather than to the production of general knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

As will be demonstrated, the Army did not know how to judge soldierly potential, and as a result relied on a system which was neither accurate nor fair. The Army measured an individual's promise by his results on examinations which were hardly more than tests of memory. Thus the would-be officer was compelled to employ a man like Litchfield to 'cram' vast amounts of data into his short-term memory--where it was stored until the examination was successfully passed.

The content of the Sandhurst examination also reflects the Army's inability to appraise the potential of candidates. The exam did not consist of subjects even remotely related to the abilities, attitudes or values generally associated with military personnel. There were two compulsory areas: mathematics and English. In addition the candidate had to compete in three optional areas. A combined total of at least 900 points was required from these. But the options were not weighted equally. The Classics paper had a total of 3600 points possible, while no other area exceeded 1200 points.

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<sup>1</sup>Dixon (p. 250) uses Haig's employment of a crammer as evidence of his overall incompetence.

<sup>2</sup>Field Marshal Earl Wavell, Soldiers and Soldiering (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

The student of the Classics had a decided advantage.<sup>1</sup> This was probably intentional. A knowledge of the Classics, according to the Victorian ethos, was an essential component of the gentlemanly image. Gentlemen, in turn, were believed to make good officers.

Haig was very impressed with his crammer. 'Litchfield', he wrote, 'seems a sharp, well-read fellow about 50. He says I have a look of determination.'<sup>2</sup> Though the compliment may have been motivated by a desire to please a paying customer, it was no less accurate. As Drummond mentioned, Haig was not one of the 'careless lot of youngsters'. After the first week at Hampton Court he abandoned his diary altogether and concentrated upon his studies. Haig chose Classics as one of his options, though he noted that 'I found I had forgotten Latin greatly.'<sup>3</sup> He also chose French. His third option is not known, nor is it clear how long he spent with the crammer. Whatever the duration, the venture proved beneficial. He passed the exam on his first try and entered Sandhurst on 12 January 1884.

Just as the entrance exam had been inadequate for selecting officers, so the Sandhurst system was inadequate for training them. Haig encountered an educational approach at the College which essentially duplicated that of the public school. Classics were over-emphasised.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Other options included languages, ancient history, moral philosophy and other subjects borrowed from the public school curriculum.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 19 July 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 23 July 1883.

<sup>4</sup>Colonel Addison, superintendant of the College in 1868, wrote that 'To anyone who will consider the intellectual exercise that a good lesson in first-class Greek or Latin authors involved, and who will compare this with the formal, though in their way valuable studies which constitute military science, the conclusion would be obvious that to drop Classics, just at the time when the mind is beginning to open to their full appreciation is, educationally, a misfortune.' The opinion was written before Haig entered Sandhurst, but the attitude survived until after the Great War. Source: Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 147.



The emphasis upon character over intellect and the cult of athleticism were found to a similar extent at Sandhurst as at the public schools. While the system may have suited young boys, it was not suited to preparing young men for careers as professional soldiers. Army educators had failed to appreciate the lessons of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War. The foundation of Prussian professionalism lay in the early training given to cadets. The Prussian system stressed a firm base in the liberal arts, supplemented by heavy doses of practical, scientific and technical instruction. While the British admired Prussian professionalism, they rejected this practical training as plebeian and thus degrading to their elite officer corps.<sup>1</sup>

A result of this bias against practical training was that the military instruction at Sandhurst was insufficient and mostly irrelevant. Courses such as logistics, military law, administration, communication, transportation and hygiene--of obvious use to the young officer--were not included in the curriculum. The cadet was not introduced to artillery or engineering problems. There was no attempt to familiarise him with the life of the N.C.O. or ordinary soldier, a move which would have aided communication between the ranks.<sup>2</sup> The military subjects which were included were of greater relevance to senior officers. There were three required subjects:

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<sup>1</sup>Information on the Sandhurst system and the Victorian Army's attitude toward professionalism can be found in John Smyth, Sandhurst, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961); Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); Alfred Vagts, The History of Militarism, (London: Hollis and Carter, 1959); Corelli Barnett, 'The Education of Military Elites', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 2 (July 1967); and Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society. The information on the German system is taken from Huntington, Vagts, Barnett and Martin Kitchen, The German Officer Corps, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>This practice was begun at West Point and the Canadian Royal Military College at mid-century, with success. See Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society, p. 148.

mathematics, fortification and surveying. The purpose of the extensive maths instruction was not made clear. The cadet also had to choose two options from a list which included French, German, siege operations, landscape drawing, military drawing and the ubiquitous Latin. Because of their background and experience, most cadets chose the latter as one of their options. Military history was not offered.

Haig's record at Sandhurst was a drastic departure from his earlier academic performances. While at Oxford, he did the minimum necessary in order to pass. At Sandhurst, he worked harder than was required. He evidently wanted to make a favourable first impression. Again, he abandoned his diary in order to concentrate upon his studies. But he also realised that the Army did not admire soldiers who were 'bookish'. He therefore tried to excel in all areas. Polo naturally proved an asset. He also mastered the drill and parade routines to perfection. The Army especially wanted men who looked and acted like soldiers. Haig's habitual attention to his dress and deportment was a valuable attribute. But this approach had its disadvantages. Haig's attention was focused inward--toward making himself a model soldier. He cared little about his fellow cadets. As a result, they found him aloof and taciturn. He made no close friendships. A contributing factor was no doubt the difference in age. Haig was five years older than the average cadet. But more important was that fact that Haig, as was often the case, found friendships superfluous and distracting.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris (pp. 8-9) wrote that Haig 'left Sandhurst as he entered it, without any close friendship for any of his contemporaries.' This is supported by Brig.-Gen. Sir James Edmonds who wrote 'The late General Sir Walter Congreve . . . told me that he was in the same room with Haig when a cadet at Sandhurst, and that Haig was taciturn and rough, but after a lecture would sit down and write out his notes, which few R.M.C. cadets have done, before or since.' Source: Edmonds' unpublished autobiography, Edmonds Papers, III/2/10.



Haig's determination was rewarded during his second term when he was appointed Under Officer of his division. The appointment generally went to the most promising cadet in each division. It gave Haig his first taste of command, and probably distanced him even further from his fellow cadets. But it is doubtful that this effect overly bothered him. He did not mind being alone, as long as he was alone at the top. At the graduation ceremony his resolute approach was further rewarded. He was presented with the Anson Memorial Sword as Senior Under Officer. He also passed first in order of merit, with athletic distinction.<sup>1</sup> The attributes which Haig demonstrated at Sandhurst--determination, ambition, detachment, conservatism and meticulousness--were ones upon which the Army as a whole placed a high value. His prospects for success in his chosen career were therefore very bright.<sup>2</sup>

Haig's success at Sandhurst loses significance when considered in relation to the low quality education he received there. The course lasted only one year. In that time the instructors sought to supplement the cadet's general education, introduce him to military subjects, and teach him discipline, drill and routine. The College set too many goals for itself, and achieved few of them. The superficial approach would have been excusable had the cadet left Sandhurst with an eagerness to continue his studies. In most instances, this

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<sup>1</sup>The athletic distinction was earned from his prowess at polo, and should not be seen as inconsistent with his earlier failures in games.

<sup>2</sup>An instructor at Sandhurst is supposed to have remarked: 'A Scottish lad, Douglas Haig, is tops in almost everything--books, drill, riding and sports; he is to go into the cavalry, and, before he is finished, he will be top of the Army.' The statement has been widely quoted, but its origin cannot be traced. It is quoted from Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 5.

did not happen. An 1870 Royal Commission which investigated the system concluded that the average cadet, inundated with abstract and irrelevant subjects and dogmatic military routine, was 'inclined to lose interest in his studies and to regard them as a nuisance which need trouble him no more once he has obtained his commission.' An equally serious fault was the failure of educators to encourage imagination and scepticism. The highly stratified curriculum caused the officer to 'regard with horror any deviation from a sealed pattern.'<sup>1</sup> As was the case with most commissions of inquiry of the type, no significant reforms followed.

The Commission referred to the average Sandhurst graduate. Haig was not average. He was highly motivated toward the study of his profession. But his areas of interest were as restricted and dogmatic as the Sandhurst curriculum. His class origins, educational background and pedantic nature combined to make him, as will be seen, suspicious of progress. He was neither imaginative nor sceptical. He certainly 'regarded with horror any deviation from a sealed pattern.' His Sandhurst training therefore reinforced his natural narrow-mindedness. The effect was that he approached his profession in a very rigid and orthodox manner. From the very beginning of his career, he conceived of himself as a guardian of tradition. This does not mean that he was against reform. The reforms he was to support were, however, mostly backward-looking. He tried to fit the ideals, values and concepts of the past into a modernised bureaucratic structure. He aimed to polish and oil an essentially obsolete machine. Though this approach resulted mainly from his conservative outlook, pragmatism may also have played a part. Unconventional

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<sup>1</sup> 'Report of the Royal Commission on Military Education' (1870), quoted in Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society, p. 148.



soldiers were likely to be regarded with suspicion and thus denied promotion. Haig saw in the Army the opportunity above all to advance himself, to succeed and to erase memories of past failings. In order to achieve these objectives it was necessary for him to harmonise with most of the obscurantist attitudes which prevailed in the Army. His desire for rapid promotion therefore further reinforced his naturally conservative inclinations.

Haig left Sandhurst in February 1885 and joined the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars. The choice of a regiment was based on a practical analysis of the options available to him. In the Oxford diary, Haig mentioned several meetings with an individual named Munn who was then a member of the regiment. It is possible that Munn gave him details of prospects with the regiment. It is doubtful that sentiment played any part, for there is no reason for him to have had a sentimental attachment to the 7th Hussars. There is no evidence that he even considered a Scottish cavalry regiment. This is further evidence of his pragmatism. By joining a Scottish regiment, he would have been left prey to the intra-service rivalries and factionalism which distorted regular patterns of promotion. In other words, by joining, for instance, the Scots Greys, Haig would have risked being labelled a Scottish soldier and thus incurring the prejudices of non-Scottish senior officers outwith the regiment. Haig sought to be, above all, a British soldier. He avoided factions and labels wherever possible, and tried to make himself attractive to all sectors within the Army, government and society.

Terraine feels that this detachment was one of Haig's 'noble attributes'.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not it was noble, it was certainly professionally advantageous. Terraine errs when he uses Haig's attitude

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<sup>1</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 7.

toward the cavalry as a further example of this detachment:'

Not even the Cavalry itself could be said to have commanded his full allegiance; it was the arm that he had joined and he made himself proficient in it. But to call him a 'Cavalry General', placing him in a category of which such disparate examples exist as Oliver Cromwell, Lord Cardigan and Sir John French . . . is to miss a main truth.<sup>1</sup>

Haig never had a detached attitude towards the cavalry. He believed devoutly in the arm--in its tactical merits as well as the ideals it represented. Throughout his career he argued that the cavalry remained indispensable in spite of technological advances in warfare.<sup>2</sup> These were not the actions of a man who wished solely to be 'proficient'. The question of whether or not he was a 'Cavalry General' will be discussed later. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of his career, Haig's devotion to the cavalry inevitably tainted his appreciation of the wider aspects of warfare.

Haig's allegiance to the cavalry was one of the few exceptions to his general avoidance of factions. It was obviously imperative that he join one branch of the Army. The cavalry suited him best. His talents as a horseman and his gentlemanly habits made him an ideal cavalryman. But the arm also offered him the best prospects for the future. This was because it was the dominant branch within the Army. Though it comprised, from 1870-1914, only nine per cent of

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<sup>1</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>A few months before he died, Haig wrote a treatise entitled 'The Future Uses of Cavalry'. In it he wrote: 'I judge the large reduction in our cavalry cadres since the War to have been unwise and ill-timed. Unwise, because, given thoughtful reorganisation and methodical training the role of the Cavalry in modern War is as important now as ever: and ill-timed because it is well known that "Cavalry cannot be improvised" and that once that splendid Cavalry spirit--the result of years of tradition and loyal service to the Country--is lost it cannot be reproduced the moment War breaks out and the Country's safety again depends (as in 1914) on the immediate mobilisation of trained Cavalry Regiments.' Source: Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 346(h).



the total forces, its officers held a disproportionate number of the senior command posts.<sup>1</sup> The cavalry officer therefore had advantages not available to the members of the other arms. Both from a pragmatic and an aesthetic point of view, then, the cavalry was Haig's best, perhaps his only, choice. And in order to derive the most benefit from the arm's dominant position, it was advantageous for him to become one of its most ardent spokesman.

An examination of the character of the Victorian Army and the peculiar position of the cavalry within it aids an understanding of Haig's career. Victorian society was marked by distinct class divisions which the Army mirrored. The officers, N.C.O.s and regular soldiers were roughly drawn from the upper, middle and working classes, respectively. Within the officer corps there were further divisions which reflected those of upper class society. In the hierarchy, the cavalry was the highest, followed by the infantry, artillery and, finally, engineers. The latter two had the least prestige because of their shorter history and because their increasingly technical nature had over the years forced them to recruit middle class individuals with scientific or professional training. This diluted the social purity of these arms. It also made them the most progressive branches of the Army. The cavalry was the most elite group because of its long, distinguished history and because it had been least affected by the advent of technological warfare. It was the military equivalent of 'old money'. The cavalry attracted men from the aristocracy whose influence in society was easily translated into military terms. Though there were certainly exceptions to this

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<sup>1</sup>The best example of this domination by the cavalry is the fact that on the Western Front during the Great War, both Commanders-in-Chief, both of Haig's Chiefs of Staff, and five out of the nine Army Commanders were cavalrymen.

upper class, cavalry domination, such as Lords Roberts and Kitchener, behind these men was a unified body of cavalymen who wielded significant control over Army affairs.<sup>1</sup>

The British cavalry retained its dominance in spite of the fact that in military terms the arm had already begun its gradual decline into complete obsolescence. The cavalry's secure position was partly due to the Victorian Army's stubborn resistance to change. In the nineteenth century the British Army was the most reactionary among the armies of the major powers.<sup>2</sup> This was because Britain, from 1814-1914, experienced no wars or revolutions similar to those which transformed the societies and armies of Germany, France and the United States. Britain's wars were mostly small colonial conflicts which reinforced, through success, the status quo within the Army. This was especially true with the cavalry, because despite its general decline, the arm remained a potent offensive weapon against militarily unsophisticated peoples. To most within the British Army, there appeared to be no real need to imitate the Prussian successes of the decade 1860-1870. The Army's role was perceived as a police force for Empire, and it was generally successful at the tasks imposed on it. Though it was not suitable for a continental war, few foresaw it taking part in one. Finally, Victorian society's attitude toward the Army reinforced this obscurantist, small war mentality. Officers were respected, but the Army as a

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<sup>1</sup>The relationship between Victorian Army and society and those between armies and societies generally are discussed at length in Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society; Huntington, The Soldier and the State; Shelford Bidwell, Modern Warfare, (London: Allen Lane, 1973); Stanislaw Andreski, Military Organisation and Society, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968); and Morris Janowitz, The Professional Soldier, (New York: The Free Press, 1960).

<sup>2</sup>If Russia is considered to have been a major power, then, it is granted, her army was the most reactionary.



whole was loathed. Since Cromwell's time the British have feared a large military force under the control of the government. The Victorian Army was grudgingly tolerated as long as it remained small and silent.

Isolated in this manner, the Army retained its traditional power structure. The hierarchy was also perpetuated because of the cavalry officers' steadfast refusal to surrender the privileges which had been theirs for generations. They fought resolutely against what was essentially a threat of extinction. Technological advances such as smokeless powder, long range rifles, improved artillery and, somewhat later, machine guns, had severely limited the effectiveness of cavalry. In wars between industrial powers, its role had shrunk to auxiliary and protective services performed behind the front lines.<sup>1</sup> The cavalry traditionalists within the British Army conducted a desperate, but no less imaginative, defence against this threat of obsolescence. Their main tactic was to reject the historical evidence which was detrimental to their position. For instance, in the American Civil War, the relevant cavalry successes arose mostly when mounted infantry tactics were used. Mounted infantry were troops who took advantage of the horse's mobility, but did most of their fighting dismounted, and usually behind cover. British observers of the war claimed that the Americans were too ill-trained or uncivilised to be worthy of imitation. Those who argued otherwise, men like Henry Havelock, a British observer of the war, were scorned as heretics by the cavalry orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> The same attitude was applied

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), pp. 7-8, 111-112, 117-118 and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup>The best discussion of this topic is found in Jay Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the Civil War, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), chapters 2, 5 and 8.

to the Franco-Prussian War. When the French cavalry, fighting according to traditional standards, was slaughtered by Prussian rifleman at Froeschwiller and elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the British, in the main, simply averted their eyes.

One regiment of Lancers demonstrated their contempt of progress by ceremoniously depositing their first issue of carbines on a dung heap. Brian Bond describes this gesture as a 'last, desperate effort to withstand the depersonalisation of war.'<sup>2</sup> This is only partially accurate. There is a more fundamental reason for the determined resistance of the traditionalists against the inexorable progress of technology. To men like Haig, cavalry constituted a 'moral' weapon. They constantly repeated Napoleon's maxim about the moral being to the physical as three is to one. Moral force--e.g. the lightning charge and cold, terrible steel of cavalry--could not, they maintained, be quantified scientifically. It was war's most important factor--the difference between two otherwise evenly matched sides. Moral strength was believed by this group to be a trait of character. Character was in turn a product of birth. The traditional cavalry argument was therefore related to the argument in support of class distinctions. In other words, if, in war, technological skill was shown to be more important than moral qualities, then intellect would prevail over character. If military might were a talent which could be learned, instead of a birthright, the doors to power and influence within the Army would be thrown open to those from outside the traditional elites.

Haig played an important part in the cavalry reaction. From

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<sup>1</sup>Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, pp. 111-112.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry, 1870-1914', in The Theory and Practice of War, ed. Michael Howard, (London: Cassell, 1965), p. 120.



his earliest days as a 7th Hussar, he tried to enhance the arm's image. He encouraged strict discipline, reorganised training methods, and emphasised the chivalric ideals which had given the cavalry its honoured reputation. But, unfortunately for him, this energy and enthusiasm was not at first complemented by a welcoming professional environment in which he could thrive. Haig's first ten years in the Army were frustrating and uneventful. The period was the most peaceful of Victoria's reign. He had no chance to take part in the few small engagements in which the Army was involved. Unlike his contemporaries Herbert Kitchener and Henry Wilson, Haig stumbled upon no lucky coincidences such as enabled them to demonstrate boldly their potential early in their careers. Instead, he had to content himself with regimental life, and had to capitalise on the infrequent opportunities for recognition which this stultified regime offered. The average young officer would have been satisfied with this arrangement. Haig, however, was too ambitious and impatient. For him the 7th Hussars were simply a stepping stone to greater things.<sup>1</sup>

The early diaries reflect the frustration and impatience which Haig felt. This was not communicated openly because the diary was never used as a place to record emotions. But his feelings can be safely inferred from the type of entries which exist. The legitimacy of these inferences will later be demonstrated by his actions. In the diaries for 1885 and 1886 military topics are hardly mentioned. These diaries in fact vary little from the Oxford volume, in which social engagements were given the majority of mention. After the impressive achievements at Sandhurst, the disappointment

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<sup>1</sup>Haig never had the same emotional attachment to the 7th Hussars as to his later regiment, the 17th Lancers.

which this unstimulating life caused him must have been considerable. The routine of his mundane regimental duties was only occasionally broken by a polo tournament or hunting trip. In fact, during his first three years in the 7th Hussars, polo provided the only significant opportunity for recognition. In August 1886, Haig was selected to play for England against the United States. The tour took place in the New England States and was enormously successful for the English team. It also gave Haig the chance to play against Tommy Hitchcock, his Oxford polo companion. Haig always enjoyed polo, but he joined the Army to be a soldier. The diaries indicate that his first two years offered him little chance to be one.

When he returned to Britain, Haig learned that the regiment had been ordered to Secunderabad. The 7th Hussars were garrisoned in India for most of the remaining time Haig spent with the regiment. At first, he welcomed the change. India was still one of the more militarily active parts of the Empire. Before his departure, Haig took a short leave in Scotland where he said goodbye to his family. He recorded no sadness nor emptiness when he sailed on 25 November 1886. Instead, the diary entries for the trip fall into two rather curious, but definitely idiosyncratic, categories. The first consists of his daily technical observations. Every day, Haig recorded statistics on the weather, miles cruised, average speed, total distance sailed, etc. He also occasionally wrote long entries describing certain parts of the ship or naval procedures.<sup>1</sup> The habit was continued on every subsequent voyage throughout his life. His fascination for this meaningless detail was at times obsessive. Though he was definitely interested in the phenomena, the real plea-

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<sup>1</sup>See Diary, 2 November to 10 December 1886.



sure was evidently derived from meticulously recording it. 'His attraction to the precise presentation of this data was perhaps a result of the highly ordered manner in which he was raised.

The second category consists of the impressions of fellow passengers which were often recorded. The best example is the following:

The passengers are as a whole an uninteresting lot. Several newly married couples, greatly taken up with each other. One Colonel, going out to command a Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, is dubbed by the laddies 'the Sentry' from the care he takes of his young wife. 5 or 6 Doctors on board, mostly married. One, styled 'the dirty Dr.', a German looking creature, excites the jealousy of an infantry captain: both have just lately entered the matrimonial state, and both men's wives are in the same cabin. The Dr. has the pull over the other, he can visit his wife's cabin to administer physic. The other feels angered no doubt, there are words, and recourse is had to the Captain of the ship! But women are at the bottom of all quarrels.<sup>1</sup>

Again, this habit was repeated on subsequent voyages. In each case, Haig wrote from the point of view of the highly detached observer. The people he observed were always strangers. An entirely different tone was used with persons with whom he was familiar. Along with the detachment there is an evident sense of superiority. It is as if those being observed displayed imperfections totally foreign to the observer.

In his book, Duff Cooper ponders whether the last sentence in the above entry is evidence of an unfortunate affair. He concludes that it is not.<sup>2</sup> This seems a safe conclusion. Similar comments occur throughout the Haig diaries and letters. Their function was similar to the restraints used by Ulysses to resist the tempting call of the Sirens. By repeating them, Haig bolstered his resolve

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, n.d., This was probably recorded around the first week of December 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Duff Cooper, Haig, p. 35.

to avoid the dangerous influence of women. Ambitious as he was, he could not afford to be distracted by them. This explanation accords with the fact that, despite his apparent contempt for women, Henrietta--who posed no such threat--was his highly valued advisor and confidante. He probably did not have as low an opinion of women as the evidence would indicate. He simply decided that his career prospects dictated a conscious avoidance of 'eligible' females. As Duff Cooper suggests, given the way he meticulously recorded each day's activities during his yearly leaves, he would hardly have had time for a secret affair. The safest assumption seems to be that he was 'in truth wedded to his profession'.<sup>1</sup>

Haig's first year in India was a repeat of the monotonous regimental routine which he experienced in England. The dissatisfaction with the slow progress of his career was exacerbated by concerns over his health. The problems began in March 1887 when he contracted enteric fever and missed a polo tournament as a result. He was ill for a month, during which time his temperature rose to 105.8. From that point on, the dreadful regularity of illness caused him considerable strain. In almost every letter to Henrietta, he spent at least one paragraph describing in detail the state of his health. Charteris felt that Haig had tendencies toward hypochondria.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore possible that he was not ever as ill as he maintained. But it is not important how ill he actually was, but rather how ill

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<sup>1</sup>Duff Cooper, Haig, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, Charteris wrote that while at Aldershot from 1912-1914 'One peculiarity became pronounced . . . Though still in perfect physical health and in the prime of life, he became obsessed with a dislike--almost amounting to horror--of the approach of old age and infirmity. Special diets appealed strongly to him, and he would devote himself assiduously to every one which attracted his notice. "Sour milk", "whole meal bread" and "Sanatogen", each in turn had its trial.' Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 65.



he believed himself to be. At one point, he wrote dejectedly to Henrietta: 'if I get any more fever I shall probably leave India at once'.<sup>1</sup> He was obviously worried that his health would not be the equal of his ambition.

Haig's first major opportunity to prove himself professionally came in 1888, when he was appointed adjutant of the regiment. The appointment suggests that--despite the lack of evidence in the diary--he must have made a favourable impression during his first three years. As adjutant, he was given authority in the training and discipline of the enlisted men. He used the opportunity to the fullest. Suddenly there is evident an extraordinary sense of urgency in his approach to his profession which, because of the lack of opportunity, had not been expressed earlier. As adjutant, Haig finally earned the chance to demonstrate his resolve.

This sense of urgency is revealed in a description of Haig left by Sergeant Major H. J. Harrison, who served with him in India. Harrison's comments balance an admiration for Haig with a frank acceptance of his faults. The faults in most cases resulted from his overzealous approach. His urgency at times overcame him. Harrison wrote that Haig was 'obsessed' with his profession:

On the drill ground, in the riding school, on the field, and in Camp or barracks, Haig was the same brilliant worker. At all times and in all weathers, Haig went about 'Soldiering', and Haig's soldiering was admitted by all who mattered, to be unrelated to ordinary drills and tactics, but was embellished with a kind of finishing off process exclusively Haig.<sup>2</sup>

Haig's zeal arose from two sources. The first was his belief in the ideals the cavalry represented. He saw himself as the arm's spokes-

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<sup>1</sup>The letter is no longer available, but Haig mentions it in his diary, on 17 August 1892. The quotation is from there.

<sup>2</sup>H. J. Harrison to Lady Haig, 17 April 1937, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 324(a).

man. The second source was his eagerness to be recognised and promoted. He was five years older than the majority of men with his seniority. While age was not particularly important at this stage, there would come a time when it would be a factor in promotion.

The ideals which Haig imparted were made clear to Harrison at their first meeting. When Harrison arrived in India as a new recruit,

- . Lt. Haig in plain soldierly language made it clear to every member of that draft that a soldier in the famous regiment must be a man, and that effeminate or sentimental qualities would prove a menace, and a detriment to promotion which in after years proved correct. Exactitude, Promptitude, Smartness and strict veracity were a few of the virtues our adjutant tenaciously adhered to, and sympathy for a technical error was unknown . . . Procrastination, Slowness of Perception, untidiness and Nerves, were items calculated to make Lt. Haig spit fire. . . . A dull-witted man was Haig's pet aversion.

In order to uphold the ideals of the regiment, certain sacrifices were required. Haig had sacrificed a leisurely life, close contact with his family, friendships and intimacies. He expected the same from his men. He wanted them to be 'blindly devoted to their duties . . . with . . . human sentiments totally eradicated.' The good soldier was the one who learned to 'ostracise the mind from everything soft or sentimental.' As Haig was wedded to his profession, he wanted men similarly attached. 'He was solidly against a soldier being married,' Harrison wrote, 'and a man who approached him with an application to take unto himself a wife did so with fear and trembling.'

Despite his profound admiration for Haig, Harrison admitted that 'Haig of the early nineties was a Martinet'.<sup>1</sup> His overzealous approach at times worked to the disadvantage of his men. He occasionally lost his sense of fairness and decency. For instance,

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations on this page are from the Harrison letter to Lady Haig. The punctuation and capitalisation are his.



Harrison described how a signaller was pilloried by Haig after the soldier lost control of an over lively horse during a parade. The incident embarrassed Haig, who took out his anger on the unfortunate man. He first accused the signaller of being of low mentality. He then ordered him to the infirmary, where he was checked for a mental disorder. At the infirmary, on Haig's instructions, the soldier was given a draught of Croton Oil, a drastic cathartic. Upon his return to the regiment, Haig placed him on a twenty-eight day C.B.<sup>1</sup>

One reason for the drastic treatment was that the signaller was a 'staff man'. These were soldiers with special duties, such as servants, farriers, saddlers and cooks. Their special duties occasionally excused them from drills, parades and lectures. For this reason, Haig loathed them. Harrison, also a signaller, once experienced for himself the effects of Haig's prejudice. Harrison was being examined for promotion to Sergeant, and Haig was one of the judges for the practical portion of the exam. The other judges felt that Harrison had completed the necessary exercises perfectly. Haig, however, did not agree, and since the judges' decisions had to be unanimous, Harrison was denied the promotion. He appealed to the Colonel of the regiment, who in turn consulted Haig. 'Haig admitted that the move was perfectly done, but that I was a Staff man, a Signaller.' Haig did not believe that members of the staff belonged in positions of responsibility. The Colonel, reversed the decision and Harrison was promoted. This incensed Haig, and, according to Harrison, 'Haig and I never afterwards were pals.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Confined to Barracks.

<sup>2</sup>All quotations on this page are from the Harrison letter to Lady Haig.

Haig did not mention the incident in his diary. It was not his habit to record instances when he had been humiliated, however mildly. Yet despite the lack of corroborative evidence, it is doubtful that Harrison fabricated the story. He held no grudge against Haig. His letter to Lady Haig was intended to convey his deep admiration and respect for his former adjutant. In spite of the injustice, his feelings toward Haig remained constant:

I have followed your remarkable soldier husband your Ladyship, through all his career . . . and have thrilled with pride on reading of his exploits, thinking of him as a brother who at the initial stages of his career chose to renounce sentimentality, human inspirations, and affectionate feelings, to embrace a real hard, irrevocable task of producing soldiers for his country and Queen.<sup>1</sup>

The image of Haig which is conveyed in Harrison's letter is of an immensely proud individual who was devoted to his profession. His faults were the result of his overenthusiasm and impatience. They were therefore partially excusable. Despite the faults, Harrison, like so many of his contemporaries, believed that Haig was an extraordinary soldier who was destined to succeed through sheer force of will.

The diaries which followed Haig's promotion to adjutant reflect the intensity which Harrison described. He no longer simply recorded social activities and his impressions of individuals. Though there are still entries of this type, the majority deal with matters affecting the regiment or the Army in general. For example, in February 1889, Haig was an umpire at cavalry manoeuvres. As umpire his duties included filing an official report on the exercise. The diary allowed him to express criticisms which would not have been acceptable in the report:

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison to Lady Haig, previously cited.



Col. Butler has no idea of manoeuvring an army. . . . his chief fault seemed to be that he gave no order as to where he could be found, so all his information went astray.<sup>1</sup>

On the next day, Haig became an active participant. Again, he found the handling of the troops faulty:

Our Cavalry under Walter was utterly useless. He has no 'method' in reconnoitering, sends out too many patrols, missed his road and did not send word . . . he had done so!<sup>2</sup>

Haig had little patience for performances like these. His criticisms were probably entirely justified. He believed that manoeuvres of this type were essential to cavalry efficiency. He loathed the commander who did not approach them with the seriousness which he felt was necessary. Part of his anger no doubt arose from his belief that he could do better. He was impatient to prove himself and frustrated when less able, albeit senior, officers were given such opportunities. He may also have been bitter because these men were often nearly equal to him in age.

Though Haig firmly believed in the value of manoeuvres, parades and drill, he rejected exercises which he thought were irrelevant or ill-conceived. For instance, on 29 November 1889, he wrote the following:

Divisional Field Day--

Regiment divided up. But Cavalry is quite out of place on such occasions as the opposing forces start so close to each other: how a man calling himself a General can think such field days of use for Cavalry I can't think?--They are quite a waste of time and do Cavalry harm in making the men ride loosely and get wild.<sup>3</sup>

The above entry conflicts with Dixon's analysis of Haig as an authoritarian soldier. In the first place, the authoritarian blindly

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 12 February 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 13 February 1889.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 29 November 1889.

respects authority.<sup>1</sup> More important, the authoritarian soldier, according to Dixon, is characterised by his enthusiasm for gratuitous drill and other meaningless activities not directly related to military efficiency. Dixon collectively terms these 'bullshit'. Bullshit is defined as any practice which aims solely at destroying the enlisted man's individuality.<sup>2</sup> Haig devised exercises with the aim of maximum utility and relevance. He may have believed in destroying individuality--as most commanders do--but his exercises simulated, as closely as possible, actual battlefield situations. Whether or not he was always correct in his appraisals, the fact remains that Haig rejected any exercise which he felt was solely 'bullshit'.

The above entry also contradicts Terraine's contention that Haig aimed only to be a 'proficient' cavalryman. Had this been the case, he would not have been as bothered by the actions of the 'man calling himself a General'. Poorly conceived exercises were detrimental to the cavalry's shaky image. Haig, as a self-conceived guardian for the traditional cavalry, devised exercises to enhance that image. His efforts on behalf of the cavalry also involved courting senior officers who were favourable to the traditional tactics. When in the company of these men, Haig made extra efforts to impress. This is the approach he took with General Bengough, Adjutant General of the Bombay Army. After the manoeuvre which Haig umpired, Bengough, according to the diary, 'expressed himself

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<sup>1</sup>Though Haig did not have the chance to air his criticisms in any other way than in the diary at this stage, this would not always be the case. It will be seen that as he rose in prestige he became more open and vocal in his criticisms, to the point where he eventually felt quite secure in openly questioning the policies of a senior officer, to his face.

<sup>2</sup>See Dixon, Military Incompetence, pp. 176-188, for a discussion of 'Bullshit'.



much pleased<sup>1</sup> with Haig's efforts. Later in the year came another chance for Haig to make an impression:

General Bengough dines quietly with us in the evening. I sat next to him. He is evidently very keen about Cavalry. We discussed several<sup>2</sup> points connected with the training of the British Cavalry.

Sometimes Haig performed tasks on behalf of the Cavalry which were totally unrelated to his regular regimental duties. For instance, he noted on one occasion that he 'sent off' registered letter to General Bengough with remarks on a scheme for teaching cavalry reconnaissance.<sup>3</sup> Bengough replied as follows:

I was much interested in your remarks on Cavalry reconnaissance and in the little pamphlet that you sent me all of which appear to me excellent. If all or most Cavalry officers took as much practical interest in instructing their men, we should soon have our Cavalry . . . equal to any in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

By doing work of this type, Haig did both the cavalry and his career a favour.

One individual with whom Haig maintained particularly close contacts was Colonel John French, who was at the time commanding officer of the 19th Hussars. The first mention of French occurs on 24 November 1891, the occasion of a large cavalry camp. There are many subsequent references to him, both at social and professional gatherings. Haig's interest in French was due to the latter's status as an ardent cavalry traditionalist. It will be seen how the two led the resistance against the pollution of cavalry by mounted infantry units. Though they had similar tactical opinions,

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 18 February 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 10 April 1889.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 8 June 1891.

<sup>4</sup>Gen. Bengough to Haig, 20 June 1891, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).

Haig and French had little else in common. They differed in social, political and most military aspects. Nevertheless, it will later be shown how Haig went to extraordinary lengths to maintain his connections with French.<sup>1</sup> His efforts reflect the extent to which he was prepared to go in his support for the orthodox cavalry.

The leaves which Haig spent in Britain provided further opportunities for courting favour with influential persons. These leaves usually extended over three months, and were timed to coincide with Ascot and a portion of the summer season. One individual whom Haig met via the social round was Major General Sir Evelyn Wood, who immediately recognised Haig as a soldier of immense potential. Their subsequent liaison was beneficial to both officers.<sup>2</sup> During leaves from India, Haig usually stayed at Henrietta's London residence, where he had the added advantage of socialising with her influential friends. His amusements while on leave included parties, dinners, race meetings, grouse shooting in Scotland and hunts in various parts of England. Occasionally he spent part of his leave at a continental spa. In 1890, he rather uncharacteristically visited Monte Carlo. Once inside a casino, however, he behaved in a more consistent manner, betting small sums and quitting when he broke even.

In 1891 and 1892, Haig did not visit Britain on his leave. Instead, he used the time in 1891 to visit Ceylon and the Northwest Frontier, while in 1892 he toured Australia. The 1891 trip was taken with a fellow officer named Dalgety. The two employed native guides to show them the noteworthy sights and to act as beaters when they hunted. The mode of travel was consistent with the level of comfort

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<sup>1</sup>These included a £2500 loan to French in 1899. See page 178.

<sup>2</sup>The relationship between Wood and Haig will be examined in detail in subsequent chapters.



to which Haig was accustomed:

Our camp is carried on twelve camels and is most extensive quite regardless of weight to be carried. For beds we have two charpoys (which do not take to pieces) with mattresses, most comfortable. There are three tents, so that one can be sent on over night for use at breakfast.

Get to bed about 10:30 and send the coolie on with about 8 camels to have breakfast ready for us next day.<sup>1</sup>

While in Australia, the luxuries were, of course, even more plentiful. Haig stayed at the residence of the Military Governor, and was treated to elegant dinners, shows and parties. He was also taken on a quite extensive tour of the country.

Despite the luxuries, Haig's attention never seemed to stray completely from military matters. While in Ceylon and on the Northwest Frontier, he paid constant attention to the strategic and tactical aspects of the land. In Australia, he wrote his comments on the Melbourne harbour defences. These military problems would never concern him in an official capacity. His attention to them reflects how completely his career had consumed every aspect of his daily life. During the trips Haig also continued to record technical observations--similar to those on his first voyage to India--in extraordinary detail. While on the Afghan border, he wrote copious notes on the Khojak Tunnel including data on length, width, gradient and type of construction. The same detail is evident in his description of a tea factory, visited a few days later. While in Australia, he wrote three diary pages full of almost microscopic print following a visit to a coal mine. As was the case before, though he was obviously interested in what he observed, he evidently took considerable delight in testing his memory and powers of observation in this way.

Aside from these leaves, Army life varied little as the years

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 2 May 1891.

passed. Haig's promotion to adjutant brought him new responsibilities and prestige, but once he became accustomed to these, the new routine was similar to the old. He had to await the recognition of senior officers, instead of making his mark through bold and impressive achievements. He had little control over his destiny, a fact which conflicted with the self-assurance he demonstrated earlier. Without war, or even a threat of war, the prospects for a drastic change in his fortune were few. In 1891, he was chosen to act as Brigade Major at a cavalry camp. He performed well, but the camp lasted only a few days. The appointment is only impressive when viewed against his otherwise mundane responsibilities. The same can be said of his selection for special duty at a similar camp the following year. This time, however, he did not even experience minor command. His duties were administrative only. The commanding officer, General Gatacre, instructed Haig to 'ride about with him, take notes and then report on the camp.'<sup>1</sup> He fulfilled his instructions perfectly. Gatacre was so impressed with the report that he ordered it printed for distribution.

Haig was again saddled with administrative duties in August 1892 when he was selected for special service with the Bombay Army, at Poona. He was asked to sort out a variety of bureaucratic problems which had been allowed to fester for some time. A typical day's work was as follows:

I finished the files on the action of Govt. regarding the arming of Native Regiments with swords or lances. They date back to 1867.<sup>2</sup>

The selection of Haig for these duties was an acknowledgement of his

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 3 January 1892.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 10 August 1892.



highly developed administrative skills. His work was widely admired. For instance, his superior officer at Poona, Colonel Hunt, praised him by saying:

. . . whatever he undertakes he puts his whole heart and soul into it and always, you may be sure, he makes things a success.<sup>1</sup>

Haig was developing into a perfect administrative staff officer. He was energetic, dependable, conscientious, and exact. He believed sincerely in the importance of the tasks he was given. While not a brash, outspoken upstart, neither was he a self-effacing sycophant, blindly obedient to authority. He knew how and when to speak his mind. But the outlook for Haig was not totally positive. The fact that these special administrative appointments were the most impressive achievements of his first seven years in the Army shows how lackluster his career had been. His lack of battle experience and his proven organisational powers were combining to label him as an office soldier, in spite of the fact that he yearned to be otherwise.

India was developing into a morass which threatened to smother Haig's career. There was no way that his talents could be fully recognised and appreciated as long as he stayed there. This was because the Army of the 1890s was divided into two factions, one led by Lord Wolseley, the other by Lord Roberts. Wolseley's domain was Britain; Roberts' was India. While in India, Haig did not become a 'Roberts man'. Terraine feels this was another example of his noble detachment.<sup>2</sup> This is only partially correct. It is true that Haig avoided factions. He did, however, court favour with individual officers from time to time. The reason he did not

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<sup>1</sup>The quotation is from the Diary, 14 August 1892. Haig was quoting a tribute given to him by Hunt at a farewell dinner.

<sup>2</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, pp. 6-7.

do so with Roberts was because he had little to gain from him. Nor did Roberts have much to gain from Haig. The two were decidedly different soldiers. Both were serious professionals, but that is where the similarities ended. Roberts was an independent, practical soldier who had a distaste for theory. He was a fighter—a general who believed the only truly valuable lesson was war. Haig, partly because of circumstance and partly a result of his nature, became one of the new breed of soldiers who stressed organisation and efficiency. These officers believed that new training programs and administrative restructuring was essential to the professionalisation of the Army. Haig and Roberts were also of different social classes, though both came from modest origins. Haig had veered toward the aristocracy, while 'Bobs' had become the soldier of the people. Because of their class differences, they had contrasting views with regard to the cavalry. Roberts was a supporter of the mounted infantry movement which Haig considered an anathema.

Haig, out of place in Roberts' domain, was not very well situated for promotion. In Britain, on the other hand, the administrative changes which suited him (and which Roberts ignored) were becoming a reality. He was too old to wait for opportunities. Realising this, he decided to go to Britain to compete for admission to the Staff College. By doing so, he hoped to sidestep the regimental route to promotion. At the Staff College he would meet officers who appreciated his talents. The option was one which he had considered for some time. His experiences at Poona finally convinced him of its wisdom. In a letter to Henrietta, he revealed that he believed India had little left to offer him:

I have found out all I want to know in the A.G.'s office and as the exam for the Staff College is very hard I think the sooner I come home the better. . . . This ought to be



my last letter to you from India for some time. I am going to wire you that I am leaving before the 24th, but it is difficult to find a word to let you know that I have finished my business here and so am returning for that reason and not because I am unwell. I . . . have very little to do here except amuse myself but as I can do that better at home I think it is best to start.<sup>1</sup>

Haig left India on 9 September 1892. He had optimistic hopes for the change in his fortune which would soon materialise. When one considers how the promise which he had demonstrated at Sandhurst had been allowed to stagnate in the unsympathetic Indian environment, it is doubtful that he was overly saddened at his departure.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta Jameson, 1 September 1892, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(b). All of the following letters to Henrietta are from No. 6(b-d), and will hereafter be cited as 'Haig to Henrietta', followed by the date of the correspondence.

## CHAPTER IV

The Staff College, 1892-1897



On 9 September 1892, Haig left India aboard the Peninsular. He described the departure in his diary:

Find Regimental Sergeant Major Humphries waiting at launch for me. We all go on board Peninsular--quite melancholy parting. Humphries wrung my hand and said I was the 'best sort he had ever had to do with.' They go down the ladder into a small boat, the tide running very strong towards the lighthouse. I watched them with my glasses until they were quite a small speck, and were out near Colaba point. It was about 6 p.m.,<sup>1</sup> and getting dark. I feel quite sorry at leaving them all.

He had mixed feelings about leaving India. The country had been a professional wasteland. Yet it was still his first military home. Tepid expressions such as the above were typical of Haig.<sup>2</sup> Seldom did any sentimentality intrude into the diary. On the rare occasions when sentiments were recorded, the diary had a purgative effect. Once the sadness was recorded, it seems to have quickly dissipated. Haig then focused his attentions forward.

Haig eagerly anticipated entering the Staff College. He hoped the College would enable him to sidestep the regimental route to promotion, wherein an officer rose slowly from lieutenant to Colonel and then--usually in the twilight of his career--to command of a brigade. This process took an extremely long time, time which Haig, at 31, did not have. He hoped that a p.s.c.<sup>3</sup> would enable him to enter the Army's mainstream. He could then land a staff appointment with an influential commander, and the light which shone on that officer would be reflected in his direction. This alternative had become increasingly popular with eager young officers of the late

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 9 September 1892.

<sup>2</sup>A similar expression was recorded on 28 April 1889 on the occasion of Haig's departure on leave: 'Beresford, Lawley and Reid drove to the station with me in the brake. Quite sorry to leave them all.'

<sup>3</sup>The Staff College Degree, short for 'passed Staff College'.

Victorian Army. But there were risks. There were still groups within the Army which rejected the trend toward professionalisation which the Staff College symbolised. Moreover, a staff appointment did not always follow a successful stint at the College. Finally, an incompetent general could ruin the careers of his staff officers. In such cases, the two years at the College would be wasted. But these were risks which advancing age and a lack of other opportunities forced Haig to take.

Haig took an extended leave of absence from September 1892 until the following June in order to prepare for the entrance examination. His preparations were similar to those taken before Sandhurst. 'Everyone goes to James or some coach', he wrote to Henrietta, 'as he saves one so much time and knows whether one can pass or not.'<sup>1</sup> Again, he seems to have abandoned his diary.<sup>2</sup> He did, however, write frequent letters to his sister, which give an adequate account of his activities. While she was on a yachting trip, he benefited from the comfort and privacy of her London residence, where he studied quite diligently. He spent every weekday from early morning until 5:00 p.m. with James. 'What rubbish it is to say it is dull for me here', he commented, 'I haven't time to think about much else than the subjects for examination!'<sup>3</sup> Henrietta made sure he did not neglect his diet by leaving one of her servants to look after him:

The good plain cooking of 'Mrs. Baxter' is just what my digestion requires. You have no idea what a difference

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 September 1892.

<sup>2</sup>The 1893 and 1894 diaries are missing. Their absence cannot wholly be explained by the preparations for the exam.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 3 November 1892.



the cooking and eatables makes when one has work to do' and no time to investigate details regarding food!<sup>1</sup>

Henrietta's relationship with Douglas was often more like that of a mother to her young son than of a sister to her brother. Likewise, his letters to her often resemble those written to Rachel many years earlier.

Henrietta was particularly concerned about her brother's health. The illnesses he contracted in India worried her acutely. She therefore insisted, upon his return, that he undergo an extensive physical examination:

In order to set your mind at rest regarding my health, I went and saw a Dr. after leaving James tonight at 5 p.m. One Hamilton Brown of a certain fame and certainly a most careful and painstaking Physician. He looked at me all over! My tongue of course, chalked with a pencil the size of my liver on my skin, put things in his ears and listened to my lungs and heart and so forth. He said he would pass me as a 'thoroughly sound man' but a little below par. So I hope you will be satisfied now. All I want is plain food and a certain amount of exercise. This I am getting now and I'll be as fit as ever in a short time.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the concern over his career which the illnesses had earlier caused him, it is likely that he was as delighted as she to hear of his general fitness.

Haig studied with James until March, when he suddenly left his crammer and went to Germany. It is not entirely clear why he did this. Though he used the visit to undergo ~~courses~~ and to improve his German, these were apparently not his main reasons for going. Rather, it appears that when the Jamesons returned to London Haig found the social whirl which continually surrounded them too distracting. 'I . . . was real sorry to leave you', he explained to his sister, 'but I fancy it is the best thing to do to come away by oneself in

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 10 October 1892.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

order to read up for this beastly exam.'<sup>1</sup> He spent most of his time with family friends in Dusseldorf. Here he found the privacy he needed and the comforts he desired. The 'frau . . . a nice looking old woman . . . has taken a heap of trouble to make me comfortable.'<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Henrietta made certain her brother was properly cared for by loaning him her butler, to whom she gave precise instructions regarding his care. 'Metcalf', wrote Haig, 'does first rate. Brings me beef tea, by your orders at 11 a.m.'<sup>3</sup> Despite the comforts, he complained that it 'is no pleasure coming to these foreign parts'.<sup>4</sup> The pressures of studying weighed on him, though this did not cause him to relax his efforts. 'You will see', he wrote sarcastically, 'I have taken Easter holidays like the rest of the world!'<sup>5</sup>

He did take a short break at Schwalbach, one of the family's favourite spas. Though he did not have much time to study during his cure, neither did he neglect his work entirely. His description of the daily schedule is typical of many subsequent visits:

I am getting on nicely here, thank you, and am feeling all the better for the waters. My times are somewhat earlier than the ones you followed. I am out by 7 a.m. and get 2 half glasses drunk in time to have breakfast at 8 o.c. I then go out again about 10:30 take  $\frac{1}{2}$  a glass and bath at 11 o.c. Walking about between drink and bath of course. Then another  $\frac{1}{2}$  glass and a bit of a walk and back here at 12. The lunch at 1:15. At about 4 I have some chocolate as I have a grand hunger here! and at 4:30 the Herr Rektor comes. We do some German till 5:30, then he and I go for a walk: I lecture to him on all topics in the German tongue . . . it is his business to correct the language. I get back about 7:30 and have dinner. I have omitted the afternoon drink which we take on the way for

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 March 1893.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 19 March 1893.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 March 1893.

<sup>5</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 April 1893.



the walk. The time passes most quickly: it is almost as well I have some work to do in this place.<sup>1</sup>

Haig's methodical nature was perfectly suited to cures of this type. He did not visit the spas for the active social life which he found there. Instead, he sincerely believed that his ailments could be cured by a rigid adherence to the schedule of rests, waters and exercise.

Haig returned to England in mid-May to begin final preparations for the examination. He stayed in Richmond 'rather than interfere with the "family arrangements" at the flat'.<sup>2</sup> He returned to James for the two weeks prior to the test. The exam was held from 29 May to 12 June, and totalled forty-two hours. It was arranged similarly to the Sandhurst exam, with compulsory and optional areas. Haig's long months of intensive preparation proved futile. Though he finished in the top twenty-eight candidates (the statutory number selected via the exam) and therefore technically qualified, he failed mathematics,<sup>3</sup> one of the compulsory subjects. In this section, a total of 200 points (out of a possible 400) was required.<sup>4</sup> Haig scored 182. The failure was probably the most bitter disappointment of his career, and caused him a great deal of personal embarrassment.<sup>5</sup> He had placed

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 6 May 1893.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 27 April 1893.

<sup>3</sup>Terraine, in Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 8, states that Haig failed arithmetic, but it was actually mathematics. See 'Regulations Regarding the Staff College', HMSO, 1894.

<sup>4</sup>In other words, an individual who otherwise qualified by being in the top twenty-eight, was disqualified if he failed to get at least 50% in all of the compulsory subjects.

<sup>4</sup>In a letter dated 21 May 1935 to Duff Copper, H. J. Creedy, of the Staff College wrote: 'With reference to your letter of 7th May about D. H. and the Staff College, I first consulted Edmonds who was a fellow student. He writes that Haig never "let on" to his fellow students that he had failed for the Staff College. His story was that he had qualified in 1894--that is with the "year" previous to that with which he entered the College--but for private reasons had not wanted a nomination until 1895, to join the College in January 1896.' Copy in Edmonds Papers, I/2B/18b.

so much store in the advantages of a p.s.c. There was, however, one remaining option open to him. Each year the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, nominated four officers from among those who failed to gain entry via the competitive exam. The Duke made his decision from a short-list provided him by the Adjutant General. In order to gain the nomination, the candidate's qualifications had to be attested to by his senior officers--first to Sir Redvers Buller (the A. G.) and then to the Duke. Haig's superiors in India, Generals Bengough and Graves, sent glowing recommendations. But Buller refused to forward Haig's name to the Duke.

In a letter dated 10 August,<sup>1</sup> Buller explained his refusal. He maintained that the Army Health Board, in an examination held prior to the entrance exam, had discovered that Haig was colour blind. The disability was slight: he could not distinguish pink from other shades of red. Haig refused to discuss the ailment for the rest of his life, due apparently to the disappointment and embarrassment it caused him. Some biographers intimate that the ailment was the sole reason for Haig's failure to enter the Staff College in 1894.<sup>2</sup> They conveniently ignore the poor performance in mathematics. In actuality, the colour blindness was a minor issue which caused a major disagreement. Since the eye test occurred prior to the entrance examination, while the disability was not mentioned until later, it seems that Buller used the colour blindness

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<sup>1</sup>This letter no longer exists, but it is mentioned in later correspondence by Haig, found in Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).

<sup>2</sup>See Ernest Protheroe, Earl Haig, p. 17; and George Arthur, Lord Haig, p. 11. Both authors claim that Haig failed to gain entrance because of the colour blindness. Protheroe, in fact, claims that Haig 'passed the examination for admission with distinction.'



as a convenient excuse to reject Haig's recommendation to the Duke. Buller was fully justified in refusing Haig's application on the grounds of his mathematics results. By bringing in the eye test, he demonstrated that his motives were not the most honourable.

Haig tried to appeal against Buller's decision. He compiled a lengthy petition which argued that he had been unfairly treated. Referring to the exam, he maintained that:

The Secretary of State for War stated in the House of Commons that a new Examiner had been detailed for the recent Examination in Mathematics, and that the previous papers set were different to those set in previous years-- Now in every 'Official Report on Examination for Entrance to the Staff College' the attention of the intending candidates is called to the papers previously set, and they are directed to make them as guides as to what is required of them-- This years candidates have been misled in the Mathematical Papers.<sup>1</sup>

The fallacy in this argument--the fact that the exam was the same for everyone, and no one else failed the mathematics part--apparently escaped Haig. His complaint regarding Buller's action on the colour blindness issue was, however, on firmer ground:

Is it not rather late to fall back on the medical report now, because had I made 18 more marks on a paper which is acknowledged to be somewhat unfair I would have entered the Staff College without further question.<sup>2</sup>

Haig further argued that only a fraction of the candidates were tested for colour blindness.<sup>3</sup> He even found a Professor Mohren--'the great German oculist'<sup>4</sup>--who testified in writing that he was not colour blind. But the petition had no effect.

When Henrietta found that Buller did not intend to reverse his

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<sup>1</sup>Draft copy of Haig's petition to the War Office, n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Only those candidates who had their medical examinations in London were tested for colour blindness.

<sup>4</sup>Petition to War Office. It is not known whether Dr. Mohren was worthy of this distinction.

decision, she tried to use her influence on her brother's behalf. She printed a resumé which listed Haig's academic and military qualifications, dating back to Clifton. She enclosed the resume in letters to Evelyn Wood (then Quartermaster General) and Sir Keith Fraser, the Inspector General of Cavalry in England. She pleaded for their assistance. It is possible that others were also contacted.<sup>1</sup> Replying on 19 August 1893, Fraser explained the problems which blocked Haig's admission:

My dear Mrs. Jameson:

It is most vexatious that this should have happened to your brother who is the very man the Cavalry require as a Staff Officer, a man who has been an adjutant and a very good one.

I hope to meet the Duke about the 3rd of September and hope it is not too late.

I wrote to the Acting Military Secretary on the subject and he says that it is Sir R. Buller who submits names--and he does not raise any hopes saying there are others with higher claims who . . . are more likely to be selected.

It is too cruel that such a mathematical paper should have been set. Would not Mr. Campbell-Bannerman be the man to get at if this fails. Unluckily the House of Commons is full of other matters or this should be brought upon it.

I fear as a Cavalry man I have no influence whatever. If your brother was a Rifleman, he could have a better chance. I am so sorry.

Yours v. sincerely,

Keith Fraser<sup>2</sup>

The cavalry's prestige and influence was evidently minimal in this area. Buller, an Infantryman, was expressing his prejudice against the cavalry.

With no more options open, Haig had to return to his regiment. Before doing so, he visited Touraine, where he attended the French cavalry manoeuvres. The visit was undertaken on Haig's own volition.

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<sup>1</sup>There is some speculation that Henrietta may have enlisted the help of the Prince of Wales. See page 124.

<sup>2</sup>Keith Fraser to Henrietta Jameson, 19 August 1893, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(g).



It demonstrates his intense interest in his profession. He may also have been motivated by the possible effect it would have on his career prospects. In other words, he may have wished to demonstrate conclusively his merits as a serious, professional soldier while still in the company of men who appreciated these qualities. If this was his aim, he certainly succeeded. Upon his return, he submitted a report to the Intelligence Department. The report was subsequently printed for general distribution. It was praised by those in the highest echelons of the Army, as evidenced by the following letter to Major General Galbraith, Commander-in-Chief in India:

Sir:

I am directed by His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief to request that you will convey to Captain Douglas Haig, 7th (Q.O.) Hussars, now serving under your command, His Royal Highness' appreciation for the most valuable and interesting report made by that officer during his recent leave of absence.

E. F. Chapman<sup>1</sup>

A great deal of the report's attraction resulted from the fact that it was unsolicited. Haig had demonstrated that he was not an ordinary, complacent regimental officer, but a man prepared to go to extraordinary lengths on behalf of the Army.

In his usual meticulous and methodical manner, Haig analysed all aspects of the French cavalry. The manoeuvre was particularly enlightening because it was organised on a scale unknown in Britain. British cavalry exercises usually consisted of a few regiments loosely drawn together for three or four days. The French at Touraine exercised two entire divisions--each with a unified and highly organised command structure--for a fortnight. Many of the

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<sup>1</sup>E. F. Chapman to Maj. Gen. Galbraith, 5 January 1894, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e). Chapman was at that time Director of Military Intelligence.

French practices were similar to those which Haig had recommended for years. The manoeuvre therefore allowed him to test his own theories of cavalry organisation and training, with the advantage of detachment. His French report, as a result, is a distillation of his military ideology--an ideology which, it will be seen, did not alter drastically during his career. The main point which he emphasised was the high degree of initiative given to the brigade leader. Though each officer conformed to the division commander's general directives, he was free to adapt as he saw fit. This meant that 'the actual formation of the brigade, the direction of its attack [and] number of squadrons employed at any point' accorded with the 'ever-changing conditions of the fight'.<sup>1</sup> This method assured maximum effectiveness:

A cavalry division manoeuvred on such principles reminds one of a well-disciplined polo team playing a polo match. And are not much the same qualifications required for success in both cases? I mean that, just as the four players combine to get the ball through the goal--some by riding off or backing up, so as to enable one of their number to hit the ball, as much as possible unmolested, towards . . . the goal--so, according to French cavalry tactics, one brigade attacks the enemy at that point where the best result is likely to be produced, while the others support it as best they can, and do their utmost to ensure its success.<sup>2</sup>

Haig felt that the British did not appreciate the value of this decentralised approach. He was convinced that the continued ignorance of it was detrimental to the cavalry's effect, and therefore to its survival.

He was also impressed with the French staff system. Though the billets and food of the officers 'were at times of the simplest',<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, Report on the French Cavalry Manoeuvres in Touraine --September 1893, ed. by Colonel the Honourable R. Talbot, printed 1894, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 68, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 31.



he admitted that this was 'not the fault of the staff'. In other areas, the French performance was admirable:

Those staff officers whom I met seemed to go about their work with method and common sense; any suggestion from regimental authorities was treated with consideration and, if possible, acted upon. There was no fussiness apparent in their movements, and an 'obstructionist' for the pleasure of posing as a 'person in authority' seemed to be unknown here. Moreover they knew their work--seemed practical men and not merely a body of theorists. It was noted that regimental and staff officers were on the best of terms, and all seemed to appreciate the necessity to have 'union' in order to have strength.<sup>1</sup>

Haig realised that staff officers often exploited their power and position. When they did so, they impeded the army as a whole. The French had apparently learned to control this bad habit. They were the type of staff officers Haig himself wished to emulate.

In his conclusion, Haig reiterated his argument in favour of large-scale, practical manoeuvres such as he had observed at Touraine:

The necessity for simple manoeuvres of all ranks if a force of cavalry is fit for what they will have to do in war seems most evident. Not only are many regulations and instructions which seem excellent in theory practically put to the test, but all ranks are made to take more interest in their work, and seem to acquire as their standard of efficiency, 'readiness for war' instead of 'that amount of training which will pass muster before the inspecting General'.<sup>2</sup>

It will be seen that 'readiness for war' was the guiding principle behind all Haig's training and organisational schemes. He was impressed with the French acceptance of this basic principle. The report is full of praise for their technique. Though he felt that 'they might be a great deal better than they are,' he emphasised that 'their methods deserve full as much attention as do the actions of their neighbours across the Rhine.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>French Report, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

Haig returned to India when the report was completed.<sup>1</sup> His emotions must have been similar to those of a defeated general returning home. But he did not let his disappointment alter his determination to succeed. He approached his regimental duties with the usual intensity and devotion. This is proved by a letter from his commanding officer, written 5 April 1894, on the eve Haig's second departure from the regiment and India:

My dear Douglas

I cannot let you go without saying that I appreciate what you have done for the Regiment. You came back to a position that a great many people would have disliked extremely . . . Instead of making a grievance of it all, I know what a lot of pains you have taken and how much improvement in that squadron had been owing to you; and up to the last moment when you were off, you have taken just as much interest in the preliminary musketry of the squadron as if you would be able to see the results. I cannot say how much you will be missed by all of us, officers, N.C.O.s and men. Your example to the regiment has been worth everything to the boys. You know I wish you every luck. You are, I think, bound to succeed because you mean to. I hate saying 'Goodbye' as I am sadly afraid I shall never soldier with you again, but only hope I may.

Yours very sincerely,

Hamish Reid<sup>2</sup>

Reid's letter demonstrates that Haig's efforts were never motivated solely by self-interest. Though he had little to gain in India, he did not simply bide his time, but did much more than was expected of him. His belief in what he was doing precluded a half-hearted approach.

Haig returned to Britain to be Sir Keith Fraser's A.D.C. It is not clear why Fraser chose him for the post. Perhaps Henrietta's efforts on her brother's behalf had had an indirect effect. It is, however, more likely that Haig's report on the French cavalry had

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<sup>1</sup>As there is no diary it is not entirely clear when Haig arrived back in India.

<sup>2</sup>Hamish Reid to Haig, 5 April 1894, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).



established him as an authority on the training and organisation of modern cavalry, and therefore a man who could benefit the Inspector General. Fraser, like Haig, was a cavalry traditionalist; he rejected the growing enthusiasm for mounted infantry. Fraser also agreed with Haig on the need for structural re-organisation and on the value of practical full-scale exercises. They were thus perfectly compatible, and were able, as a result, to effect a wide range of necessary reform. Haig worked especially hard during his time as A.D.C. In a letter to Henrietta, he gave a revealing description of an average week:

I am off to Frensham (near Aldershot) this afternoon as we have the 4th Hussars out tomorrow for a reconnoitering day in that direction tomorrow. Tuesday we inspect the Greys in the morning and the 4th Hussars in the afternoon in the field. On Wednesday we see the Greys reconnoitering in forenoon and then we come back to London.

Thurs., Fri. and Sat. we inspect the 1st and 2nd Life Cds. here--so this week we are quite full up.

The reconnoitering means a scheme to be set, which requires a little arrangement. I enclose one just to shew you. (Destroy it please and keep to yourself). Then I have to look over the reports and comment on what was done: this takes time. So you see I am fairly busy.<sup>1</sup>

His responsibilities--inspections, devising schemes, etc.--were similar to those of his adjutant days, except that the scope was so much wider. Though only a captain, he exerted significant influence over the shape of British cavalry for years to come.

The responsibilities under Fraser continued as described above for most of 1894. In October of that year, he again attended French cavalry manoeuvres on his own initiative. This time the force practiced mobilisation exercises near Limoges. Though this action was not as instructive as the last, Haig did file a report with the Intelligence Department. The work was again widely appreciated. Just prior to the French trip, Haig received the following letter,

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 15 July 1894.

dated 20 September 1894, from the Adjutant General's office:

Sir:

I am desired by Sir Redvers Buller to acquaint you that he has placed before H.R.H. the certificates regarding your eye sight which you left for him on Thursday.

H.R.H. has expressed himself satisfied with them, and has desired that your name be retained on the list of officers who wish to obtain the Commander-in-Chief's nomination for the Staff College-- It will be considered with others when H.R.H. makes his next selection.

Yours faithfully,  
F. G. Eills<sup>1</sup>

His hopes for admission to the Staff College had been rather unexpectedly revived. Though the letter indicates that the Duke was satisfied with the oculist's findings, these were the same reports which Buller had refused to accept the previous year. It is therefore probable that Haig's French cavalry reports and his performance with Fraser--perhaps combined with pressure from other quarters--were the deciding factors in Buller's change of mind.

Haig was therefore eligible for the 1896 class.<sup>2</sup> Though he still had to receive the Duke's final nomination, it appears that some confirmation of his eventual admission must have been given to him at this time. Otherwise, he would have returned to his regiment when his duties with Fraser were completed in February 1895. Instead, he spent the rest of the year performing a variety of tasks, while he was in theory connected with no officer or regiment. This suggests that, since he would be entering the College in January 1896 it was felt (either by him or by his superiors) that it would be pointless for him to return to India

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<sup>1</sup>F. G. Eills (Military Secretary to the A.G.) to Haig, 20 September 1894, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).

<sup>2</sup>The students for the 1895 class would have been chosen by early summer 1894.



for such a short period.

Though he lacked a formal appointment, Haig was not idle. The year 1895 turned out to be the most rewarding of his career to date. During January and early February, he finished his work with Fraser, which included a new programme for reconnoitering instruction and a scheme for the spring manoeuvres. On 11 February he noted that Fraser's 'successor had been appointed and that he was "most grateful to me" for having come home to be his A.D.C.'<sup>1</sup> During March and April he took leave, and finalised the purchase of Radway Grange in Warwickshire. From there he participated in the local hunts, in which Henrietta occasionally joined. Henrietta also at this time urged him to undergo another physical examination:

. . . saw Weber M.D. just to please you. He examined me with the greatest care, compared my present condition with the last notes 1891 also the Gov'nr and Mama's constitution enquired into with the help of his books. He says that I must live carefully--meat only once a day and 1/2 bottle of claret as a maximum allowance for a whole day!!! etc. If I attend to this he says my constitution is similar to a large number of people who live to great ages! So you and I will be Methuselas together it seems! His present recommendation is Kissengen for a month, say after 4 or 5 weeks at Potsdam, then a month at Pontresina or Malaga 'without overexertion' . . . I am quite sound, no disease but liver enlarged and wants attention.<sup>2</sup>

Haig rather uncharacteristically did not follow the advice of his doctor to the letter. His career apparently came first. 'I cannot well spend time for so much water curing as Weber recommends',<sup>3</sup> he explained.

He could not spare the time because of an anxiously anticipated trip to Germany, similar in purpose to his French ones. After he

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 11 February 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 23 April 1895.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

arrived in Germany, he explained to Henrietta on 4 May 1895:

I cannot leave this country for a couple of months at least: I should say rather this part of Germany: for I have a good opportunity of seeing here all about the cavalry and their methods of training. It will then be July or at any rate the last week of June.<sup>1</sup>

The Prussian Army's efficiency and organisation naturally appealed to Haig. Yet his interest in the Prussian cavalry had an ironic twist. In 1870, the Prussians demonstrated their understanding of modern tactics by mauling the French cavalry, a force structured according to traditional standards. Unlike their European counterparts, the Prussians had willingly accepted the limited role of cavalry in the face of modern firepower. Yet in 1895 Haig attended manoeuvres which involved large forces of traditionally organised cavalry. The impulse for this apparent retreat toward orthodox cavalry standards came with the accession of Wilhelm II in 1888. The Kaiser loved pomp, and the cavalry were the arm best able to provide it. His revitalisation of the German cavalry was a hollow one, misunderstood by British observers. While Haig saw it as a return to the fold, it was in actuality no more than the creation of a plaything for the Crown.

While in Germany, Haig was aided by letters of introduction supplied by Fraser. 'I am getting on very well here', he wrote to Henrietta, 'all the German officers I have met do everything to make my stay agreeable and show me anything I want.'<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, not everyone was as hospitable. Colonel Swaine, the British Military Attache, resented Haig's intrusion. On one occasion, according to Haig, he cunningly tried to block Haig's attendance at a parade.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 May 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Haig was bitterly angry over the incident. His explanation for Swaine's attitude was that

. . . he being an Infantry man has never said much about Cavalry matters in his reports home. However I am independent of him. Outwardly he pretends to be most friendly to me, offers to assist me in anything I want, but when I ask a thing he throws obstacles in the way.<sup>1</sup>

Swaine and Haig clashed throughout the entire visit. But, with Fraser's assistance, he was able to side-step the Military Attache. He became acquainted with General von Loe, Governor of Berlin; General von der Planitz, head of the Cavalry; and other senior officers. These men allowed him access to exercises usually closed to foreign observers. He realised the difference their assistance made, and at the end of his visit gave Henrietta the names of eight of these men so that she could purchase gifts for them. 'You can spend £30 or more if you like', he instructed. 'But I must have genuine articles that will last: for of course it would never do to say to me next time I come back "what rubbishy things are made in England."' <sup>2</sup>

The high point of the trip was a meeting with the Kaiser. Swaine at first stood in the way, but eventually Fraser's influence prevailed. The meeting took place during a 'Parade Tafel at the Emperor's Schloss'. Haig described the scene:

I found myself not among the foreign officers but at the end of the table opposite the Emperor. . . . On my right was a Colonel Crosigh who commands the Fusilier Guards here-- and a friend of the Emperor. After we had been a certain time at dinner the Emperor drank his health, then signalled to him that he wished to drink my health. So I stood up and emptied my glass to the Kaiser in the usual style--'nae hieltaps'. He did the same . . .

After dinner we went into the picture gallery and the Emperor

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 May 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 9 June 1895.

came and asked me about my regiment, about Keith Fraser and what I was anxious to do and the length of the leave which I had. Altogether he was most friendly.<sup>1</sup>

Haig always enjoyed occasions like the above. He basked in the attention paid him by such an eminent personality. The opportunity was particularly sweet after the long, dreary years in India.

On the practical side, Haig's observations of the German cavalry proved even more valuable than his earlier French ones. He had great admiration and respect for the German military character, and was therefore eager to learn as much from his stay as he could. Despite his usual reserve, he described one unit as 'the finest squadron I have ever seen--pace, direction, all perfect, and cohesion always maintained.'<sup>2</sup> He also praised the performance of the German staff:

. . . General of Division usually details one officer, perhaps more, to ride well ahead  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile or more to keep in sight of patrols and gallop back and report as soon as any change of enemy's intentions is noticed. Chief Staff Officer receives reports and only passes on to the G.O.C. the more important ones. Necessity of reconnoitering ground well before hand is fully recognised and impracticality of sending in written reports when cavalry are in presence is acknowledged.<sup>3</sup>

As in the French study, Haig demonstrated his understanding of staff problems. He was aware that poor reconnoitering could lead to an inaccurate appreciation of the tactical situation. More importantly, he realised that administrative functions could be magnified out of proportion, thus creating a 'paper war' and a staff unresponsive to the real needs of the army as a whole.

His awareness of these problems was further demonstrated in the

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 31 May 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 17 May 1895.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 10 May 1895.



report he submitted to the Intelligence Department--a welcome sequel to the French studies. As was the case in those reports, Haig placed extra emphasis on the high degree of flexibility and initiative given to the junior officers within the German system. The Germans went even further than the French by giving a great deal of authority to the captains of the individual squadrons. He admitted that the British were beginning to accept the wisdom of this system, but criticised the regimental colonels who had been reluctant to surrender central control of operations:

. . . in our army there are many men of sound judgement who cannot shake off the prejudices due to their old fashioned training . . . These officers of the old school maintain that the colonel should show his authority by a constant interference in the captain's sphere of activity.<sup>1</sup>

Haig argued that under the traditional system the colonel and his staff 'have more to think of than they can manage.' The result was a confusion over the real needs of the separate units within the regiment, which was in turn 'detrimental to the regular process of training'.<sup>2</sup>

He admitted that the traditional system--what he ironically termed the 'orderly staff system'--had advantages. By focusing obedience on a single figure--the regimental colonel--it was 'eminently conducive to the establishment and maintenance of discipline.'<sup>3</sup> While he believed in the value of strict discipline, he could not agree to retain the old system on this ground alone. To do so, he argued, would be to ignore a fundamental principle of military organisation:

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, Notes on German Cavalry, 1896, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 74, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

. . . if the Army had been instituted merely for the purpose of working in a regular and symmetrical manner in time of peace . . . we should be the first to recognise that the orderly staff carries out this object to perfection . . . But just the reverse is the case; not only was the Army not instituted with this particular object in view, but it has another, which is to prepare itself for active service . . .<sup>1</sup>

Here again is the distinguishing feature of Haig's military ideology. He saw his ultimate responsibility to be the preparation for war. With this in mind, though he may at times have been incorrect in his judgements, he analysed every scheme in terms of its relevance to wartime conditions.

The application of this criterion caused him to reject the orderly staff system. In the heat of battle, he alleged, the system disintegrated. The influence exercised by the Colonel and his orderly staff--the 'mainstay of discipline' in peacetime--'completely vanishes'. He further maintained that, in consequence, 'the whole weight falls back on the shoulders of the captain'--a strain for which he would not be prepared.<sup>2</sup> Chaos would result. Haig's preference for a more decentralised system on the German model demonstrates his awareness of the problems of communication in the age before wireless telegraphy. In Haig's time, when a unit went into battle, it was almost completely cut off from communication with, and therefore control by, the regimental commander behind the lines. The ubiquitous 'fog of war' was of extreme density. As Haig recognised, this meant that a high degree of initiative needed to be given to the commanders of the separate units.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, German Report, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



A further advantage of the German technique was that it reduced the bureaucratisation of staff work. Haig emphasised this in his report. 'The office work, which is enormous in our army and which absorbs such a numerous staff . . . is absolutely reduced to nothing.'<sup>1</sup> Even in peacetime, centralised control under the orderly staff system meant that the colonel and his staff were out of touch with the men in the squadrons. This resulted in the issuing of unnecessary and irrelevant orders. When the individual squadron leader was given greater control over the affairs of his unit, as in Germany, the central bureaucracy was kept to its minimum size. Haig admitted, however, that one reason for the smooth running of the system lay in the nature of compulsory service:

The military year begins with the enlistment of recruits, and ends with their discharge. Each year is a counterpart of the year before; month succeeds month, and day succeeds day, bringing with them duties anticipated by and known to all concerned.<sup>2</sup>

This was the sort of order and regularity which Haig coveted. though he did not venture into the realm of politics by arguing in favour of national service, this was clearly his message.

Finally, Haig stressed that the oil which made the German system run smoothly was its unique discipline:

Discipline in the Prussian cavalry service is very strict. I venture to think, however, that it is based not upon fear of punishment but rather upon the general all around efficiency of the officers in whom the rank and file are taught from the day they join the army to place implicit confidence. It has been for years acknowledged in this army that no officer is able to command and instruct men unless by his personal worth and thorough knowledge of his duties he can impress upon his subordinates and inspire obedience. The discipline thus seems natural, and being so it is less likely to slacken on service than if it had punishment as its base.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, German Report, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

He believed that the discipline originated from two sources. The first was that the officers 'are really up to their work and are intellectually superior to those whom they command.' The second source was 'the way in which the army is organised and duty discharged tend to show up the commanders at all times as superior beings to the rest.'<sup>1</sup> For Haig, therefore, the German Army demonstrated the continued importance of character. The system depended on the social superiority of the officer. At the same time, however, Haig admitted that national service meant 'the presence in the ranks of individuals from all classes of society.'<sup>2</sup> He apparently did not notice that this contradicted his statement that the officers were the social superiors of their men, and that, therefore, German discipline could not be explained simply as a result of class differences.

Haig's visit to Germany was shortened by an unexpected summons from home. The Army was preparing for a staff tour--one of the first of its kind--on Hayward Heath. Colonel John French was to command a cavalry force, and he asked Haig to be his Staff Officer. As expected, Haig replied that he would be 'delighted',<sup>3</sup> and then hurried home from Germany. Staff tours were manoeuvres conducted without troops. As such they provided the chance to solve organisational problems without the chaos and expense of large troop movements. The tours were organised at the instigation of the Army's 'progressive' wing--men like Wood and Wolseley who stressed practical exercises as the best preparation for war. Haig, one of this group,

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, German Report, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 12 June 1895.



was of course enthusiastic about participating. His participation in this one, so soon after the German trip, provided an excellent opportunity to apply his recently gained knowledge of 'modern' cavalry tactics.

The staff tour was, on the whole, quite successful. It had added benefits for Haig, as it was his first opportunity to work closely with Wood. It is clear from the following excerpt of a letter from Wood that Haig made a favourable impression with the Quartermaster General:

It gave me much pleasure to meet you and have a talk and the more so because I knew you pretty well on paper before--I think I may honestly say of you, what we cannot always say, that the expectation, though great, was even less than the pleasure you gave me by your conversation.<sup>1</sup>

In his letter, Wood also requested information on the role of N.C.Os in the training of the young German conscript. Haig replied that he was an authority only on the cavalry, not on the entire German Army. He reiterated the point covered in his cavalry report, again placing special emphasis on the subject of discipline and what he saw as its class foundations. The information supplied hardly satisfied the original request, but Wood was no less delighted. As a result, Haig's stock rose even further. In a subsequent letter to Henrietta, he confided that 'Sir E. W. is a capital fellow to have upon one's side as he always gets his own way!'<sup>2</sup> The statement could not have been more accurate.

After the Staff Tour, Haig took a six week rest at the spas in Kissengen and Freudenstadt. Again, he sedulously complied with

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<sup>1</sup>Evelyn Wood to Haig, 1 July 1895, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(g). All letters between Wood and Haig are from this file and will hereafter be referred to as 'Wood to Haig', or vice versa, followed by the date.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 July 1895.

the prescribed schedules of drinks, baths, rests and exercise. Henrietta joined him near the end of his cure. They then toured the countryside, staying with German officers with whom Haig had become friendly. This visit was also cut short by a summons from home. This time, Haig was appointed Brigade Major for a full-scale cavalry manoeuvre to be held near Aldershot. At first he understood that he would be teamed with French, but when he arrived he found 'a little difficulty as to which Brigade I should go'.<sup>1</sup> He was finally assigned to a Colonel Brabazon who commanded a brigade formed from the 7th Dragoon Guards and 9th Hussars. As Haig had little respect for Brabazon's talents, he was disappointed with this posting.

After the first few days of the manoeuvre, Haig analysed Brabazon's performance in the diary:

Drill of Squadrons and Regiments bad. C.O.s too intent on looking at their commands in place of what is going on.

Direction seldom right: wished for B. Major to direct the base squadron as of old-- The custom at Aldershot!

Pace uneven. It seems like trying to run before they can walk, doing Brigade movements before squadrons are trained!

Jumping by Sections!! This should be done by squadrons at this time of year.<sup>2</sup>

Haig was probably fully justified in his remarks. Though he had never commanded a brigade, his experiences under Fraser and his observations of continental cavalry made him an expert on the correct handling of large forces. He had helped to devise the scheme used in this very manoeuvre. Of all the officers present at the exercise, Haig was quite possibly the most knowledgeable in the training and organisation of cavalry forces.

His criticisms reflect his experiences of the previous two years.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 14 August 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 15 August 1895.



For example, he again stressed the importance of decentralised command. He was disappointed at the slow acceptance of this system by some British cavalry officers:

O. C. 9th Lancers moved his regiment all round the compass before forming it in Brigade Mass. With such C. O. is the rapid independent leading of regiments impossible [sic] . . .

One form of attack formation always practised. Front line of 7 or 8 squadrons always reinforced by three squadrons of second line. This practice seems to destroy initiative of subordinate commanders and is impractical.<sup>1</sup>

The most severe criticism was directed at the senior commanders. These were the men whom Haig felt were the greatest obstacles to progress. For instance, he chastised General Combe, who commanded a division, for his antiquated technique:

Combe took the Division about noon and manoeuvred much in the old cut and dried style. Then took the Division back to the same old place and did his theatrical performance again.<sup>2</sup>

Combe, it seems, was one of the 'officers of the old school' whom Haig criticised in his Notes on German Cavalry--a man who could not 'shake off the prejudices of [his] old-fashioned training'. The problem with his 'cut and dried' manner was that it meant that 'nothing [was] left to the initiative of the individual leaders'.<sup>3</sup>

The manoeuvre was officiated by the Duke of Cambridge. The Duke had by that time been Commander-in-Chief for thirty-nine years.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 20 August 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 21 August 1895.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 22 August 1895. These criticisms are some of the first examples of the subtle blend of the progressive and the traditional which characterised Haig throughout his career. This was first mentioned on page 74. Haig believed wholeheartedly in the continued relevance of traditional cavalry. But he recognised that officers like Combe were destroying the cavalry through inefficiency and backward training practices. He advocated progressive procedures for the organization, training, education and administration of the cavalry. But beneath this progressivism, as will be seen, there was a solid core of traditional tactical and strategic policies which were, and continued to be, immutable.

He was just beginning to accept, albeit grudgingly, that the Army was slipping from his grasp. At one of the formal lunches during the manoeuvres,

. . . H.R.H. (who sat at the end of the horseshoe table while I was nearly opposite in the bend) expatiated against The Times and Lonsdale Hale who said that he was 'too feeble as C. in C.' He then made a short speech and a dramatic exit without sitting down after talking.<sup>1</sup>

It is rather ironic that around this time the Duke finalised Haig's nomination to the Staff College. The Duke had become increasingly reactionary as certain groups within the Army embraced reform.

'There is a time for everything', he frequently emphasised, 'and the time for change is when you can no longer help it!'<sup>2</sup> Yet by nominating Haig, the Duke advanced the career of one of the Army's new breed of progressive, professional soldiers, who favoured the administrative and training programs which the Duke considered anathemas. Uncertainty and controversy still surrounds this nomination. A number of historians maintain that pressure which Henrietta placed upon the Prince of Wales was decisive.<sup>3</sup> There is no concrete evidence to support this claim. It is more likely that Haig had by this time successfully demonstrated to all concerned that he was worthy of a place at the College. Even if the Prince did intervene, the fact remains that Haig's claim was as legitimate as that of any other member of his class.

Prior to entering the Staff College, Haig was asked to complete the new edition of the Cavalry Drill Book. French began the revision, but abandoned the task when he was promoted to Assistant Adjutant General late in the year. Though the work did not offer Haig as

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 28 August 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in R. Godwin-Austen, The Staff and the Staff College, (London: Constable, 1927), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>Dixon (Military Incompetence, p. 250), makes this unsubstantiated claim.



wide a scope for expounding his military ideology as the earlier continental cavalry studies, the book did reiterate the principles of training which he held dear. As Duff Cooper rightly maintains, 'That such a task should have been entrusted to so junior an officer is evidence of the high opinion generally held of his attainments.'<sup>1</sup> It is also evidence of how much he had accomplished in the three years since he first left India. He had become the authority on modern cavalry organisation. His position within the Army hierarchy--even without a p.s.c.--was an advantageous one. As the letter requesting his assistance accurately maintained, there was 'no one better able to do it than yourself'.<sup>2</sup>

When Haig entered the Staff College in January 1896, the institution had just entered what has been termed its 'golden age'.<sup>3</sup> The College had had a long and difficult struggle to establish itself. It was founded in 1808 as a 'Senior Department' to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. The Army's general disdain for professional education, in addition to a lack of funds, stunted its early growth. The first fifty years were characterised by inexperienced instructors and lazy students. The scandals of the Crimean War, however, focused attentions on the need for comprehensive staff training. As a result, the Senior Department was permanently separated from Sandhurst in 1858 and moved to Camberley, where it became, formally, the Staff College. A few minor changes were also made in the curriculum and the teaching staff. But the enthusiasm for reform was short-lived. The Army as a whole had not accepted the need for professionalisation. The College

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<sup>1</sup>Duff Cooper, Haig, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Walter James to Douglas Haig, 21 October 1895, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(e).

<sup>3</sup>Lonsdale Hale, 'The Staff Work in the War', Nineteenth Century, Volume 48, (September 1900), pp. 369-370.

was caught in a vicious circle. It did not have the reputation to attract promising young officers, yet without these officers, it was impossible to improve its reputation. It thus became a haven for married officers or those seeking to avoid service abroad.<sup>1</sup>

The Franco-Prussian War again alerted people's minds to the need for professionalisation, to which the Cardwell reforms were a partial response.<sup>2</sup> The Staff College was significantly affected by this change of attitude. Colonel Edward Bruce Hamley, the distinguished military scientist and historian, became Commandant of the College in July 1870. He improved the curriculum, adding more military theory and reducing the emphasis upon mathematics and other less relevant subjects. The p.s.c. slowly gained prestige as a result of Hamley's efforts. As a result, the number of men applying to the College began to exceed the number of positions available, a rare occurrence previously. With competition came improved quality in all areas. The vicious circle was broken. But there was still a limit to the College's popularity. While many in the Army accepted Cardwell's maxim that 'neither gallantry nor heroism will avail without professional training',<sup>3</sup> many others did not. 'Professionalism', according to Harries-Jenkins, 'because of its association with Utilitarianism, seemed to . . . these objectors to be a middle class phenomenon, the adoption of which threatened external recognition of the Army as an

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<sup>1</sup>The best source on the Staff College is Brian Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972). Other sources used in this portion of the chapter include those by Godwin-Austen, Huntington, Barnett and Harries-Jenkins, previously cited.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Cardwell, Liberal Secretary of State for War, 1868-1874. His three great reforms were the abolition of purchase, the institution of short-service, and the creation of a reserve.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted from Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, p. 19.



elitist organisation.<sup>1</sup> This group was strong enough to limit the scope of reform.

The resistance was led by the Duke of Cambridge. He considered the Army his army and could not bear to see it disfigured by the reformers. Early in his career he had been an ardent supporter of the College. But the institution, in its maturity, rejected the principles of its patron. The Duke characteristically ridiculed professionalisation and its middle class roots by describing Staff College graduates as 'very ugly officers and very dirty officers'.<sup>2</sup> As long as he remained Commander-in-Chief this attitude prevailed and the College could not hope to emulate its German counterpart. The men who supported reform--Wolseley and Wood, among others--were themselves aristocratic in their outlook. They still adhered to the belief that character was more important than intellect. But they maintained that professionalism and elitism could co-exist. Haig, for example, praised German professional standards, while emphasising the importance of the German officer being the social superior of his men. Wood, Wolseley and Haig realised that the increasingly technical nature of warfare demanded a sophisticated professional organisation which they planned to incorporate in the traditional class structure.

The year Haig entered the Staff College was a watershed for the Army. The Duke retired as Commander-in-Chief, and Wolseley replaced him. The progressives had triumphed. Though the resultant changes were not as drastic as during the tenures of Cardwell and Richard Burdon Haldane, there were significant reforms of the Army.

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<sup>1</sup> Harries-Jenkins, Victorian Army and Society, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Godwin-Austen, The Staff and the Staff College, p. 214.

Large-scale practical manoeuvres were carried out for the first time in years. The possibility of a General Staff on the German model--as suggested by the Hartington Commission--came under active discussion in political and military quarters. The College itself was also affected. The staff of instructors was its finest to date. A p.s.c., as Haig's efforts attest, was considered essential to the young officer seeking rapid promotion. But there remained within the Army some uncertainty over the necessary extent of reform. The progressives retained many conservative beliefs. They embraced the German system with half-hearted enthusiasm. Most of them maintained their faith in traditional cavalry tactics. They did not entirely understand, and often discounted, the importance of technological changes. This was partly due to a continued distrust and fear of the middle class technician. The best example of this prejudice was the maintenance of Staff College quotas throughout the period prior to the Great War. Every year, only six men from the artillery and engineers (combined) were admitted to the College. The Army justified the quotas by claiming that the artillerymen and engineers already possessed the training the Staff College provided. This does not explain why there was a need for a Staff College at all, if these officers were ready-trained for staff positions. They did not in fact have equal access to these positions. The quotas were, in truth, a thinly veiled effort to protect the status of the privileged classes within the Army.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sir John Adye pointed out that in his year, 1886, the top eight places at the Staff College examination were won by R.E. or R.A. men. According to the quotas, only six of these men were at first admitted. Adye, who was placed seventh overall, was only admitted after the Duke reluctantly nominated him. There were not enough infantry and cavalry officers who had passed the examination remaining to fill the places allotted to men from those arms. Rather than admitting the extra R.A. or R.E. men who had passed high, the Army instead admitted seven infantry and cavalry officers who had failed. See Sir John Adye, Soldiers and Others I Have Known, (London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 1925), pp. 137-139.



Another aspect of the progressive dilemma involved the concept of a professional staff. The problem was in part one of definition. Bond offers seven separate definitions for the term 'general staff'. Simply stated, these fall into two broad categories: (1) a general's staff and (2) a staff of generals.<sup>1</sup> The first concerns an administrative, logistically orientated body, devised to deal with the problems of transport, communication, intelligence, etc. for the military unit to which it is attached. The second category entails the concept of the 'brain of the army',<sup>2</sup> of which the German General Staff of the 19th and 20th centuries is the best example. The British did not fully understand this idea. Their acceptance of a General Staff on the German model was blocked by a fundamental concept of British military history, which can be termed 'the cult of the omnipotent commander'. Victories were traditionally, and perhaps justifiably, attributed to the leadership and brilliance of a single individual. Wellington and Marlborough spring to mind. In smaller campaigns, Roberts at Kandahar and Kitchener at Khartoum are further examples. Failures--those of Cardigan, Gordon and Buller--equally were seen to have arisen from the mistakes of one man. The British customarily looked to a single general as the fount of all strategy and tactics during a battle or campaign. This was not an unusual practice, but it was the antithesis of the German system. The Germans had great generals such as Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Moltke. But each of these men led a staff of generals-- a 'brain of the army'. The duty of this highly trained staff was to advise and inform the leader. The

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<sup>1</sup>See Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, pp. 30-32 for an excellent discussion of the various definitions of 'general staff' and the implications for British staff training.

<sup>2</sup>The term is borrowed from Bond.

leader could not--nor would he wish to--act independently of the staff. The main premise of this system was that genius was superfluous. It was not supposed to depend upon a brilliant leader. Rather, every member of the staff was trained to be able to assume general control without any significant change in direction or effect.

Without a General Staff, the British concept of a staff officer, and the role of the Staff College, was confused. In some ways the duties of the British staff officer were more diffuse than those of his German counterpart. The Staff College trained its students to handle all the administrative and logistical problems of an army at war. The Germans compartmentalised these problems and trained specialists for each separate branch of military activity. Yet in other respects the British staff officer's training and eventual duties were severely restricted. The College, unlike its German counterpart, did not teach grand strategy. It saw its role as that of training administrators only. In other words, it did not prepare its students for positions in a 'brain of the army'. To this extent it reinforced the cult of the omnipotent commander. But there was a paradox in this approach. While the College did not prepare its students for the positions and duties of high command, but rather those of the lower staff, it was exactly those higher positions to which the graduates aspired. The students of the 1890's were the cream of the Army. These men had high ambitions and did not look forward to a future as a lowly staff officer. Haig, for instance, spoke of becoming Commander-in-Chief.<sup>1</sup> It was not clear where men like Haig were supposed to obtain their training in grand strategy, if the Staff

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<sup>1</sup>H. J. Harrison, in the letter to Lady Haig quoted in the last chapter, wrote that Haig often mentioned that 'to rise to the rank of C. in C. . . . was his own ambition.'



College was the highest rung on the Army's educational ladder. It was apparently still believed that leadership qualities, in addition to strategical creativity could not be learned. For Haig and his contemporaries, therefore, the College was a largely irrelevant prerequisite to high command.

The confusion regarding the Staff College's purpose was reflected in its curriculum. Significant improvements had been made during the College's ninety year history. The courses were at least militarily relevant by 1896, something which had not always been the case. But the curriculum for the first year, according to Brigadier General James Edmonds, consisted mainly of topics which the serious officer should already have mastered:

We sat at a few lectures--the good boys in the front row, the idle asleep in the back row--and heard what amounted to no more than the reading of some paragraphs of the regulation books (mostly out of date) and some pages of military history. . . . we did a great deal out of doors mostly making ordinary sketch maps . . . With our own fair hands, under an artillery instructor, we dug trenches, put up wires, made temporary bridges . . . and amid a scene of indescribable confusion we laid a few railway rails.<sup>1</sup>

The education improved during the second year, but the scope remained limited:

We worked on a number of 'schemes' out of doors, comprising most of the small tactical operations of war, writing little appreciations and operation orders for a mixed force, not for a brigade or a division.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Edmonds, typed carbon of unpublished memoirs, Chapter XIV--'The Staff College', Edmonds Papers, III/2/1-34. Hereafter cited as Edmonds Memoirs. Edmonds was perhaps too harsh in the above criticism. The outdoor exercises which he mentioned were ones with which he, as an engineer, would have been familiar, but a cavalryman like Haig would not have been. They were actually quite progressive innovations designed to acquaint the officer with the tasks engaged in by his men. But Edmonds correctly maintained that too much time was spent on these exercises to the detriment of training more relevant to actual staff duties. He remembered, for instance, only one war game during his entire time at the College, which ended 'in a complete fiasco'.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Haig's notebooks for his two years fall into six categories: Military History, Strategy and Tactics, Fortification, Staff Duties, Cavalry Studies, and Applied Sciences. As was the case at Sandhurst, the College tried to accomplish too much. The list testifies to the British Army's conception of the staff officer as a jack of all trades. Unfortunately, the training also made him a master of none. Edmonds acidly commented that the only valuable lessons were 'how to make a march "graphic" and how to use a Playfair Cypher.' He added that 'I shall never consider that the Government returned me value for the two years of my life, the engineer's pay I had to give up and the additional £400 I had to spend.'<sup>1</sup>

The staff at the College, though the most impressive up to that time, still fell hopelessly short of the ideal. The Kriegsakademie, the Prussian equivalent, had a staff of forty-four fully trained professors and instructors. The Camberley group consisted of six military officers and two civilian instructors--one of whom Edmonds described as 'bone idle'.<sup>2</sup> Only one instructor, Major C. R. Simpson, had served on a staff, though he was 'conspicuously silent' about his experiences.<sup>3</sup> The Commandant was Colonel H. Hildyard, a man who held generally progressive educational beliefs and who valued professionalism. He tried to reverse the past emphasis upon written examinations and partially succeeded by abolishing the final exam. 'We do not want any cramming here', Hildyard argued, 'we want officers to absorb, not to cram.'<sup>4</sup> The 'schemes' which Edmonds mentioned were an example of Hildyard's emphasis upon exercises which demanded the

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<sup>1</sup>Edmonds Memoirs, Chapter XIV.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, p. 154.



application of general knowledge to specific practical problems, without the aid of resources, notes, or intensive cramming.

The dominant staff member was Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, author of the classic Stonewall Jackson. He was a military historian of the highest repute, and had the 'unique ability to train the judgement of the students by placing them in the shoes of the various actors in the drama.'<sup>1</sup> Henderson differed from most of his contemporaries by emphasising the relevance of the American Civil War. The Franco-Prussian War, on the other hand, he regarded as relatively unimportant. His approach therefore lacked balance--neither war deserved to be ignored, and dangers could result from the over-emphasis upon either. The respect for Henderson's scholarship also at times undermined his progressive teaching. As Bond points out, his study of Stonewall Jackson became the Staff College bible.<sup>2</sup> As such, it encouraged the cramming which Henderson and Hildyard abhorred. As a primer for unalterable military truths, it was invaluable. But, as Liddell Hart points out:

. . . the method of study was one of excessive concentration on detail rather than an inquiry into the broad principles of the leader's art and comparison of that with the great captains of all ages. . . . to be able to enumerate the blades of grass in the Shanandoah Valley and the yards marched by Stonewall Jackson's men is not an adequate foundation for leadership in a future war where conditions and armament have radically changed.<sup>3</sup>

A perusal of Haig's exam papers shows that Liddell Hart was not being facetious. On one problem--'Report on the Valley of Virginia indicating the strategic points'--Haig was criticised for neglecting to mention

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<sup>1</sup>Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, The Remaking of Modern Armies, (London: John Murray, 1927), pp. 170-1.

one bridge.<sup>1</sup> On another problem he was marked down for failing to remember that the sun sets earlier in Virginia than in England.<sup>2</sup> While both of these points were important to Stonewall Jackson, by 1896 they were mere trivia, hardly worthy of Haig's attention.

Haig's Staff College class was an exceptional one. It included some of the most able military minds of the generation, men like Edmonds, George MacDonogh,<sup>3</sup> Thompson Capper,<sup>4</sup> and Richard Haking.<sup>5</sup> The class also included men who reached very high rank--such as Haig and Edmund Allenby<sup>6</sup>--though this was partly due to the coincidence of war. Edmonds broke down the careers of the 1896 class as follows:

Of the batch of thirty-one, four (two generals) were killed in action or died of wounds; one was wounded and died of enteric in Ladysmith; one died in France of exposure; two were wounded and invalided. Of the remainder, two cavalrymen became field-m Marshals and peers; fifteen became generals (of whom eight were knighted); one (the youngest) got no further than colonel; three retired for reasons of health before 1914; one resigned as he had come into a fortune; and one, 'the bravest of the brave' shot himself, his mother-in-law and her lawyer in une drama passionelle.<sup>7</sup>

In the final class standings, Edmonds and MacDonogh finished far ahead of the rest. At the end of the course it was the custom to publish the graduates' names, ranked in order of their total points scored. In order to disguise the huge gap between these

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Military History Papers--1896', Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. The comment referred to a paper on General Jackson's orders for 24 May 1862.

<sup>3</sup>Later Director of Military Intelligence and Adjutant General.

<sup>4</sup>Later Major-General, killed in action 1915, while commanding the 7th Division.

<sup>5</sup>Later Commander of the XI Corps during the Great War.

<sup>6</sup>Later Field Marshal and Viscount, hero of Palestine Campaign.

<sup>7</sup>Edmonds Memoirs, Chapter XIV.



two officers and the rest of the field, the list was changed to an alphabetical one, which omitted the scores. As would be expected, neither officer found the course challenging. 'I did not find it necessary to work very hard at Camberley',<sup>1</sup> Edmonds wrote. He compiled a history of the American Civil War in his spare time, while MacDonogh used his to qualify as a barrister.

In contrast to Edmonds and MacDonogh, Haig allowed himself no free time nor outside interests. He applied the same technique which had been successful at Sandhurst. The diary was again abandoned. He isolated himself from other officers and concentrated upon his work. The effect upon the other officers was as would be expected. They found him aloof, taciturn and rather arrogant. Edmonds wrote:

My fellow students . . . were a cheery lot, with the exception of Captain Douglas Haig . . . who worked harder than anybody else, was seldom seen in the mess except for meals, kept himself to himself, and had only one intimate, Arthur Blair . . . He had rather outraged our finer feelings by writing in the Leave Book, on arrival, a request for three days leave 'to shoot, to meet the Prince of Wales' . . .<sup>2</sup>

Edmonds further described Haig's manners as 'abrupt and unsympathetic'.<sup>3</sup> This attitude made him quite unpopular. When the students had to choose a Master for the Staff College Drag Hunt, they chose Allenby-- 'because we did not want D.H.'--even though Haig was by far the better rider.<sup>4</sup> George Barrow, a member of the 1897 class, wrote that 'as an instance of Haig's unpopularity at Camberley, no one would sit next to him at mess if there was a place vacant elsewhere.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edmonds Memoirs, Chapter XIV.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>James Edmonds to Lord Wavell, 27 August 1936, Allenby Papers, 6/III, (papers collected by Wavell about Allenby at the Staff College).

<sup>5</sup>George Barrow to Lord Wavell, n.d., Allenby Papers, 6/III.

On one outdoor examination, Haig and Blair were teamed with Edmonds. Haig wrote the required outline of the tactical situation and then gave his paper to Edmonds, instructing him to 'provide the jargon which the examiners expected.'<sup>1</sup> Terraine cites this incident as an example of his extremely practical nature, of his refusal to be overly concerned with problems which did not interest him. This may be true, but at times, as will be seen, Haig provided far more 'jargon' than the examiners expected, on exercises which were equally uninteresting. The exercise described by Terraine was designed to test the officer's ability to work with others, as much as his tactical knowledge. Haig's behaviour is an example of his egocentricity and his overall sense of superiority. It is also rather hypocritical, in the light of the glowing praise Haig gave to the French staff officers for their cooperative spirit during the 1893 manoeuvres which he observed.

The resolute approach was not as successful at Camberley as it had been at Sandhurst. Granted, the ability of the class as a whole was higher at the Staff College. But the different result can also be attributed to the different system of education. Haig's failure to duplicate his earlier achievement reflects the College's progress away from the pedantic Sandhurst system, one to which Haig was ideally suited. His talents lay in his ability to digest large amounts of data which he then would spew out in a highly ordered but unoriginal fashion. Barrow felt that one could always tell from Haig's plan for a 'ride' which military text he had last read.<sup>2</sup> 'If I commanded an Army and was opposed by Haig, I

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<sup>1</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 12. Terraine provides no source for this incident which Edmonds fails to mention.

<sup>2</sup>George Barrow, The Fire of Life, (London: Hutchinson, 1942), p. 105.



should always know what he would do.'<sup>1</sup> The Staff College demanded a higher, though perhaps not high enough, degree of independent, creative thought. Edmonds, in fact, found Haig 'terribly slow on the uptake'.<sup>2</sup> When Haig and Blair asked Edmonds if they could accompany him on a three-day exercise held near the end of the course, Edmonds refused. He later explained to Haig that 'I could not afford to be handicapped by you and Blair any longer'.<sup>3</sup> Haig did not do poorly at the Staff College. His exam papers in fact show that he did quite well. But the fact that Edmonds and MacDonogh--two men of a very different type of intellect--scored so much higher proves that the system demanded some talents which Haig did not possess.<sup>4</sup>

Haig's inadequacies were most evident in outdoor exercises in which he was required to think quickly on his feet without the aid of a text. In written exams, his methodical, painstaking approach was rewarded. For instance, Henderson's comments on one assignment--to 'Write General Jackson's orders for the Battle of Kernstown on the 23rd of March 1862'--reveal Haig's particular approach:

This is excellent work, but don't make your reasons too long--that is don't give up more time than you can profitably spare to my problems.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barrow to Wavell, n.d., (previously cited).

<sup>2</sup>Edmonds Memoirs, Chapter XIV.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>It is unfortunate that the only placings for which there is certainty are those of Edmonds and MacDonogh. It is not known where Haig finished because official reports are not available. Edmonds, however, intimates that Haig finished near the middle of his class.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Military History Exam Papers--1896'.

On another essay, the remarks were similar:

A very satisfactory piece of work. The only criticism I would make is that the memoir is too elaborate. Including the extracts in the margin, it is longer than intended.<sup>1</sup>

Haig would become so involved with a question--quoting sources and citing extensive examples--that he often lost sight of the purpose of the original lesson. A frequent fault was that he was unable to finish the question due to a lack of time or space. He spent days preparing his answer to a tactical problem which, on an actual battlefield, he would have had but hours in which to respond. The approach contradicts Haig's earlier emphasis upon practical and relevant training for officers.

Aside from the tendency toward excess, Haig's written work was generally of high quality. Most of the exercises had comments similar to the following:

I congratulate you on this memoir. In every respect it fulfills the requirements laid down in the instructions, and it bears evidence on each page of painstaking work . . . the style of the memoir is all that would be wished and the maps are most complete.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that the instructor's frequently criticised Haig's prose and grammar, though this was not ordinarily an area of consideration in the grading of the work. Henderson remarked that his stops were put in 'pepper-pot fashion',<sup>3</sup> a complaint which is supported by any perusal of Haig's correspondence. Haig's problems with grammar and punctuation probably resulted in part from the fact that he read neither novels nor magazines, nor

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Military History Exam Paper on Wellington's 1815 Campaign', n.d., Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Military History Exam Paper on Confederate Operations in Virginia, June 1862', n.d., Haig Papers, Acc. 3155, No. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Haig, 'Military History Exam Paper on Wellington's 1815 Campaign'.



indeed any non-military literature. Both his interests and his energies were confined to military areas. On one occasion Henderson brought this deficiency to Haig's attention. 'I do not think', he remarked, 'that some study of good authors would be wasted. It is very useful for a Staff Officer to be able to write very good prose.'<sup>1</sup>

In the 1890's, the Staff College had made some progress toward the professional ideal. But much more was needed. The problems of the College were similar to the ones which had plagued it since its inception: a lack of funds, an incomplete understanding of professionalism, an inexperienced staff, class prejudice and poorly defined goals. The College also suffered from the inadequacies which characterised upper class education throughout the Victorian period. There was still a distaste for technology, an over-emphasis upon rote learning, an over-valuation of character and a tendency toward pedantry. All of these faults, and the failure to correct them, can be explained by the fact that the College was an organ of what remained essentially a very conservative Army. This was unfortunate, especially when it is considered that the students themselves included some of the best military minds of the day. The dedication of these men can not be questioned. They believed wholeheartedly in the value of professionalism. They aspired to the highest echelons of the service. With adequate funds, an experienced staff and a proper definition of its goals, the College could have developed the enormous potential of these men. Instead, these men were left to learn the higher skills of their profession by themselves, while the College put them through a course of mundane,

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, 'Military History Exam Paper on Wellington's 1815 Campaign'.

sometimes dreary and largely irrelevant training.

The Staff College had a minimal effect upon the late-Victorian Army. Officers entered with firmly entrenched military ideologies and left with their minds virtually unchanged. This was certainly true of Haig. Terraine claims that the two years at Camberley were of 'great profit to him'.<sup>1</sup> Charteris likewise maintains that he 'carried away with him a belief in the "educated soldier"'.<sup>2</sup> But neither biographer is able to give any real evidence of the profound effect the College was supposed to have had. He developed no new insights, no new skills. It was his character, not his education at the Staff College (or anywhere else), that fueled his rise in the Army. Barrow feels that the power of Haig's character was evident even at Camberley:

Haig did not stand out among his fellows at the College because of any intellectual superiority. It was not brains that brought him forward; there were those who had bigger and better-stored brains than he. Neither was it tact, of which he had little; nor imagination, of which he had none. It was not hard work, for others worked as hard, some harder. It was his personality and power of concentration, 'the one prudence in life', the source of strength in war, the secret of success in business, trade and all the affairs of life. His was the dominant personality that made itself felt in every company, in every place, in the office, on the polo ground, in the mess, on the field.<sup>3</sup>

According to General W. T. Furse (a fellow student and later Commander of the 9th Division on the Somme) Henderson thought Haig was the most promising student in the 1898 class. But it seems that this judgement was based, as Barrow described above, on aspects of Haig's personality such as his single-minded will to succeed, not on his

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<sup>1</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Barrow, The Fire of Life, p. 43. Barrow made a similar comment in the letter to Wavell cited earlier.



actual performance in the College exercises.<sup>1</sup>

Haig is an excellent example of the College's failure. He had inexhaustible energy and dedication. But Barrow felt, perhaps correctly, that his 'power and habit of concentration was to no small extent accountable for the dwarfing of the imagination.'<sup>2</sup> His ambition had severely restricted the horizons of his perception. The Staff College did nothing to broaden them. Because Haig mirrored many of the characteristics of the College--pedantry, distrust of technology, elitism, etc.--he was encouraged along the path he had so long ago chosen. The College failed because it lacked the resources and dynamism to make Haig not simply an educated soldier, which he was even before Camberley, but a thinking soldier, which, in the broadest sense, he was not.

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<sup>1</sup>W. T. Furse to Lord Wavell, 17 November 1936, Allenby Papers, 6/III. In the letter, Furse recalled a conversation with Henderson in which the latter described the 1896 class as 'a good batch, and the best man in it was Douglas Haig.' Terraine (p. 12) and others are fond of an incident in which Henderson supposedly said to a group of officers which included Haig, 'There is a fellow in your batch who one of these days will be Commander-in-Chief.' Edmonds (Memoirs) is the source of the quotation. But biographers like Terraine do not quote Henderson's next sentence which, according to Edmonds, was 'No, not any of you Captain Haig.' A small point this, but regardless of whom Henderson meant, the prophecy could not have come true because the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Army (which is technically the one to which Henderson referred) was abolished in 1904. Far too much has been made of this rather cloudy incident.

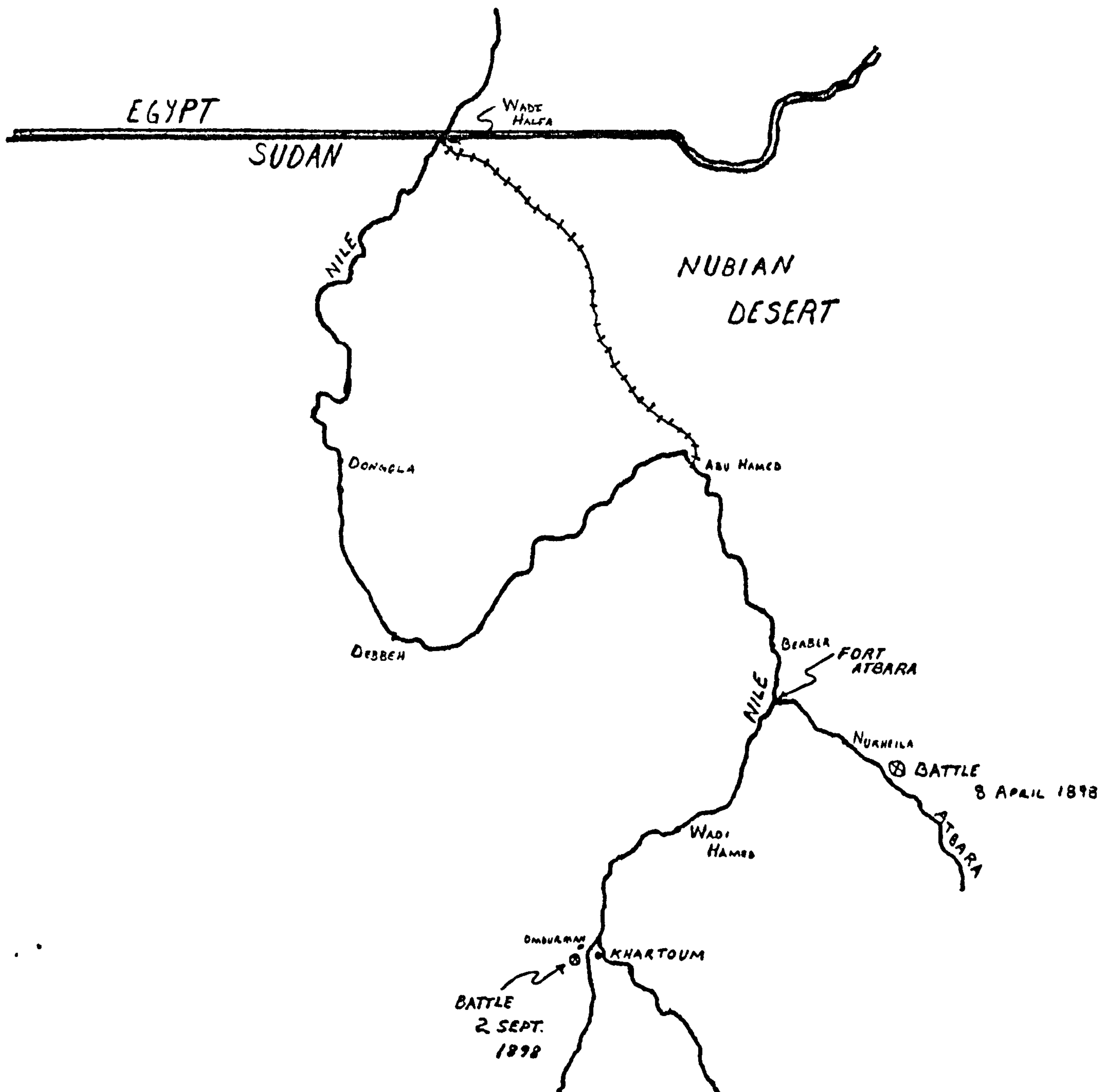
<sup>2</sup>Barrow, The Fire of Life, p. 44.

CHAPTER V

The Sudan Campaign, 1897-1898



# THE WAR IN THE SUDAN



In early January 1898, Major General Sir Herbert Kitchener requested three officers from the graduating class of the Staff College. The men were to join his campaign against the Dervish tribes in the Sudan, a campaign which had been inspired partially by a desire to revenge the killing of General Charles Gordon at Khartoum fifteen years earlier. The choice of the officers was left to Sir Evelyn Wood, who was at that time Adjutant General. Based on the favourable impression formed of Haig over the past few years, Wood selected him as one of the fortunate three<sup>1</sup>. The selection of Haig demonstrates the importance of influence within the military structure. While Haig was an impressive soldier, the same could be said of many of his fellow graduates who were not selected. Wood's patronage came at the perfect moment in Haig's career. Had he returned to his regiment, he might have slipped quietly into obscurity. Instead he was given active service, the most coveted of military assignments. The gesture was repeated two years later. His experience in the Sudan, and later in South Africa, catapulted him into the front rank of the Army.

Wood's choice of Haig is understandable. But the Adjutant General had other ideas than simply rewarding an officer for whom he had high regard. His selection of Haig had a devious side to it. Wood did not entirely trust Kitchener. The two generals had little in common. Wood was therefore eager to keep a close watch on the commander. This was to be Haig's function. Wood used the appointment as a surety by which to guarantee Haig's loyalty. Haig's duties were probably implied rather than formally arranged. Wood simply expressed a keen interest in knowing Haig's opinions on how

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<sup>1</sup>The other two officers selected were Thompson Capper and Arthur Blair. The former certainly deserved the selection. Blair was, however, one of the less impressive graduates. His selection is curious.



the war progressed. Each of his letters contained a sentence or two to the following effect:

Write to me as frankly as you will, you may be sure  
'I shall not quote you to anyone . . .'<sup>1</sup>

While the above was certainly not a direct order, Haig responded as if it were one.

Before leaving for Cairo, Haig stayed with the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham for the weekend of the 22nd and 23rd of January. Other guests included Wood and Boyd Carpenter, the Bishop of Ripon. The Prince discussed the forthcoming campaign with Haig, and urged him to 'write regularly'<sup>2</sup> from the Sudan. On Sunday, the group gathered for a service given by the Bishop. Haig described it in his diary:

Excellent sermon from the Bishop on Gordon, text Hebrews 11th Chapter, 8th Verse, 'and he (Abraham) went out and knew not whither he went.'<sup>3</sup>

This is one of the rare mentions of Gordon in the diaries. Haig did not mirror the public fervour for revenge. This insouciance was typical of him. Haig was not inspired by imperialistic, nationalistic, nor overly sentimental motives. His patriotism was sincere, but it was never used as a trumpet call. His inspiration was instead highly individualistic. He was driven by an intense desire to do his duty and to succeed. This meant that he never questioned the justification for motives behind a military action. He fought where he was ordered, did his utmost, and perceived of

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<sup>1</sup>Wood to Haig, 13 April 1898. In the 25 April 1898 letter Wood similarly wrote: 'You may depend upon it that I shall not show your letters to anybody, and you may write me as frankly as you like.' A typical response by Haig can be found in the 14 February 1898 letter to Wood quoted on page 148.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 23 January 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

no factors other than purely military ones.

Haig's first campaign differed significantly from other Victorian wars. The Sudan campaign was a deliberate act of policy, not a sudden, rash reaction to a colonial threat. The impetus came from two sources: the desire for revenge and the need to counter French encroachment in the upper Nile. The revitalisation of the Egyptian economy and military over the previous few years made the exercise viable. In other words, the campaign became politically acceptable to the British because the Egyptians would bear the greatest burden. There was to be little strain placed on British taxpayers and only a negligible loss of British lives. Since funds were limited, the emphasis was placed on efficiency and organisation--a rare occurrence in previous wars. Kitchener, an engineer renowned for his organisational abilities,<sup>1</sup> seemed the perfect commander. He justified the confidence in him by building a railway from Wadi Halfa across the Nubian Desert to Berber. Many had believed this to be an impossible task. Gordon, fatally for him, had previously vetoed the construction. The railway brought troops and supplies to within 150 miles of Khartoum. It avoided a dangerously long line of communication and saved many lives as a result.

The eventual success of the Sudan Campaign showed how well the British had trained the Egyptian Army. The change since its defeat in 1882 by Wolseley was remarkable. The Army consisted of 20,000 conscripts, mostly Egyptian fellaheens, but including also a large contingent of black Sudanese. Each Egyptian battalion had three British officers, each Sudanese four. British officers were seconded for two-year stints, which could be broken at the

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<sup>1</sup>It will be seen that Kitchener's reputation as a brilliant organiser was not entirely deserved.



individual's discretion. Those who joined were rewarded with promotion to a rank immediately above their British one.<sup>1</sup> But despite the vast improvements in all areas, the Egyptian Army in 1898 was still an untested commodity. Many British officers believed that the force would dissolve the minute it came in contact with the raving Dervish hordes.<sup>2</sup> The Dervish, according to Cyril Falls, were 'among the most formidable and dangerous savages the British ever had to face.'<sup>3</sup> The weakest link in the Egyptian Army was the cavalry. It consisted solely of fellaheens, as the Sudanese could not be trusted to care for their horses. The officers were Egyptian and British, with no set proportion. Many British officers believed that the Egyptian, whether officer or fellaheen, could not be imbued with the moral qualities central to the arme blanche.

Haig arrived in Cairo on 3 February, after an uneventful seven-day journey. He formally enlisted in the Egyptian Army, and then boarded a steamer to Wadi Halfa. While on the Nile, he recorded one of his usual observations of his fellow passengers:

There was rather an amusing incident the first night on board this steamer. There are about 7 or 8 Germans out of the 32 passengers on board. At dinner one of them sent to have the saloon door shut. Some non-Germans insisted on its remaining open. The Germans at first retaliated by putting up their coat collars and the lady sent for her jacket which she slung vigorously around her expansive

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, Captain Haig was promoted to Bimbashi, the rank equivalent to Major.

<sup>2</sup>Colonel John French was one of the many sceptics. Witness Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898: 'If you see Col. French you might show him this letter confidentially, for the Gypsie Cavalry is really better in some respects than he thinks.'

<sup>3</sup>Cyril Falls, 'The Reconquest of the Sudan', in Victorian Military Campaigns, ed. B. Bond, (London: Hutchinson, 1967), p. 293. Background information on the Sudan Campaign is taken from this source. It is the most balanced treatment. The war has not received much attention from historians, though some less reliable sources were published immediately after it.

shoulders! . . . Many of us laughed and the Germans no doubt felt uncomfortable and got up en masse and left the table, like many petted children. No doubt they felt as if they had withdrawn from the Concert of the Great Powers. So in due course they will receive a telegram from 'Wilhelm' to congratulate them on their spirited conduct in supporting his Kolonial Politik and 'Mailed Hand' theory on the banks of the Nile!<sup>1</sup>

The passage is one of the rare bits of humour in Haig's letters. It perhaps show that he was in unusually high spirits at this time. He felt extremely fortunate to be given active service. 'The longer I stay here the more lucky I seem to be', he commented. 'The crowds of fellows that have asked to be taken and refused is very great.'<sup>2</sup> He assured Wood that 'I am ever mindful of how much I am indebted to you.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig met Kitchener at Wadi Halfa. He found the Sirdar 'very cordial'.<sup>4</sup> Kitchener, evidently mindful of Haig's reputation as an efficient organiser and expert instructor, outlined a plan to send him to Debbeh to train a squadron in 'bad order'.<sup>5</sup> Haig optimistically (but wrongly) predicted that 'if anything doing Debbeh will be the direction of the attack'.<sup>6</sup> He was 'looking forward to going to Debbeh where I shall have a free hand and be able to train the squadron as I like.'<sup>7</sup> These plans never materialised. A few days later, on 20 February, Kitchener ordered Haig to Berber. In a rather impatient and disappointed tone Haig wrote that 'I don't know

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 February 1898. This is a reference to the Kaiser's telegram to Kruger after the failure of the Jameson raid.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 6 February 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Wood, 14 February 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 15 February 1898.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 February 1898.



at all what he wants me to do.'<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving for Berber, Haig asked his sister to send him '2 or 3 boxes of supplies, each box not to exceed 150 lbs in weight and to be about 3 ft long by 1½ broad and 1 deep.'<sup>2</sup> In the boxes she was to pack:

. . . jams, tinned fruits, cocoa, vegetables, haddock in tins, tongue, biscuits, some hock, and a bottle or two of brandy or any other sort of drink.<sup>3</sup>

He also asked for soap, toiletries, extra blankets, sun shades, hats and silk underwear. The boxes were designed to be mounted on the side of a camel, of which Haig had three, along with four horses, a donkey and a goat. The latter supplied his milk. To look after him and his animals, he engaged:

. . . a cook, . . . the black fellow 'Suleiman' as a body servant . . . a syce for every two horses and a camel boy.<sup>4</sup>

Later his 'retinue' grew larger, with additional servants and animals. He did not feel that this was at all excessive. He pitied, but felt no guilt about the officers of the British Brigade who were 'limited to 30 lbs of kit . . .'<sup>5</sup> Haig's attitude was not uncommon among Victorian officers, who saw no reason to abandon gentlemanly habits simply because they were at war.

Haig arrived at Berber on 28 February. His arrival coincided with the northward advance of a large Dervish force under the Emir Mahmoud. Kitchener responded by concentrating his force at the

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 20 February 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 February 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 2 March 1898. He also commented on 1 April that the officers of the British Brigade 'live in the greatest discomfort'.

junction of the Atbara and the Nile--subsequently called Fort Atbara. Haig's appreciation of the situation was characteristically optimistic, as evidenced in the 2 March letter to Henrietta:

It would be great luck if they did come on because then they would bring the whole matter to a conclusion at once. For if they gave fight and are beaten we would probably pursue them right on to Khartoum. Certainly over 150 miles, but no doubt the tribes on the flanks of the dervishes would rise and assist in annihilating them as they fled.<sup>1</sup>

A short time later, he made great issue out of rumours that the Dervishes were reduced to a diet of date-like fruits. 'Not very sustaining, I should think'<sup>2</sup>, he commented in a letter to Henrietta. Unfortunately, the events did not proceed as smoothly as Haig had optimistically predicted.

To strengthen his force, Kitchener called upon the British Brigade mentioned above. This was a force entirely separate from the Egyptian Army. In order to reach Berber when Kitchener wanted it, the troops had to march 100 miles in six days. While the feat was widely admired by officers in the Sudan and at home, Haig was not impressed. As he pointed out in a letter to Wood, a battle was not imminent. Aside from the glory gained by the commanding officer, the march achieved nothing. Furthermore, Haig argued, it damaged the morale and fitness of the men:

When the Brigade got to El Hassa (7 m. from Berber) the majority were very weary, and the feet of some officers and men were sore and bloody. So, without knowing the reason for such forced marching, I very much question whether, if it had been necessary, actually to oppose the enemy on the Atbara, these men could have fought effectively. I mean that my conclusion is, do average marches and have the bulk of the command fit for battle and any emergencies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 2 March 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 25 March 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Wood, 15 March 1898.



The brigade was commanded by Major General W. F. Gatacre, whom Haig first met in India. Haig believed that he was partially to blame for the condition of the force. Gatacre, he wrote, was an 'awful fidget' who

. . . had them out for all kinds of parades. Even here, at a distance of 18 miles from the Enemy's Camp, he has his whole Brigade on duty in two hour reliefs all night through fear of a night attack. This must be rather<sup>1</sup> fatiguing as the days are hot and men can't rest then.

At home, Haig rejected practices which he considered irrelevant or frivolous. He especially loathed them in wartime.

The Egyptian Cavalry Brigade which had been moved to Berber consisted of ten squadrons, seven of them commanded by British officers. One of these, the 7th, was supposed to go to Haig. Haig's annoyance with Kitchener's indecision increased when, on 13 March, he learned that this plan had also been shelved:

Letter received from Broadwood that 7th Squadron has arrived at Berber 'but Sirdar does not want a change of Squadron leaders made at present while Dervishes still threaten to advance: things must develop one way or another in a week or ten days.'

What does this mean? The Dervishes are certainly not threatening to advance! Is the Sirdar prepared to do so?<sup>2</sup>

Haig felt like a spare part. He joined in patrols and did his best to learn the Egyptian system, but the work was hardly satisfying. He evidently believed his talents were being wasted. On one especially frustrating patrol, he was in the saddle all day and saw no sign of the enemy. Afterwards he recorded that 'the tactical training of British officers not necessary for this kind of patrol! A native might well have been sent!'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 13 March 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 17 March 1898.

Haig blamed Kitchener for the continued uncertainty surrounding his duties. Though in part self-important pique, these complaints had justification. But he was not being singled out for ill-treatment. Rather, Haig's dilemma was a symptom of the Sirdar's chaotic method of command. On the surface, things seemed to run smoothly. The big tasks, such as the railway, were completed on time and in order. Underneath, however, there was disorder and confusion. Kitchener tried to maintain complete control over all aspects of his command. This meant that minor tasks usually handled by staff officers were left in disarray. On 1 April, Haig gave an accurate account of Kitchener's methods in a letter to his sister:

He is a man that does everything himself and in fact has no Head Quarters Staff at all! Indeed General Hunter, who has hitherto commanded the troops in the field, cannot get the Sirdar to tell him what his position in the Army is!

In addition the Sirdar is most silent and no one has even the slightest notion what is going to be done until he gives his orders!

He has 2 aides-de-camp who have a hardish time but beyond them he employs no staff at all. Sometimes it might be better for the comfort of the troops if he had a Staff.<sup>1</sup>

Haig believed that the size and sophistication of modern war demanded a large, efficient staff. He considered Kitchener's methods obsolete and dangerous. He communicated these criticisms to Wood, who sympathised in a letter to Haig dated 25 April:

I can well understand that when a General tries to run a force without any Staff, which is practically what the Sirdar has been doing, there will always be a waiting for orders, and some uncertainty. I have pointed out to him . . . that however well he may be able to command large bodies of troops without any intermediate links, yet as he is not immortal, should a bullet or sickness strike him down, it would be hard on his successor.<sup>2</sup>

Haig's dilemma at Berber foreshadowed future confrontations with

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Wood to Haig, 25 April 1898.



Kitchener over the role, and indeed necessity, of a trained staff.

While waiting for an appointment, Haig made observations of the Egyptian Army. He recorded his opinions in various letters home. Contrary to many of his fellow officers, Haig did not discount the fighting value of the average soldier. For instance, he wrote of the Sudanese that 'they seem fine strong fellows and move well.' Their 'battle-training and march-discipline'<sup>1</sup> were poor, but this was not their fault, but their officers'. He reiterated the point made in his earlier cavalry studies that responsibility and initiative had to be given to the junior officers, especially the British ones. 'The real pity is that so many valuable and keen young officers are not more used to train the men.'<sup>2</sup> He was specifically referring to Blair and Capper who 'find it difficult to find work to do'.<sup>3</sup> He was, however, not impressed with the Egyptian officers:

My chief complaint against this cavalry is that many of the officers (Egyptian) are duffers. We play polo with them twice a week, to make them ride and be a bit more manly, but the majority don't improve much. They sigh after a life of ease at Cairo, and want 'medaille d'or' to wear with the ladies!'<sup>4</sup>

Haig felt that good officers, able to provide proper training and discipline, could make the Egyptians and Sudanese into fine soldiers. He realised, however, that the raw material was not what he was used to, which meant that flexibility was needed. For instance, he recognised that the poor march discipline of the Sudanese was due in part to the fact that their wives accompanied the columns.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 15 March 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Wood, 25 June 1898.

While this could not be stopped, Haig believed it could be controlled. 'The blacks won't march without them', he argued, 'Why not recognise the fact and allow the women, within moderate proportions?'<sup>1</sup> He even went so far as to advocate feeding the wives. Since the soldiers could not be stopped from sharing their rations with their wives, not providing for the women would only lead to a hungry and dispirited force.

Similar conclusions on the value of proper training and discipline followed Haig's first encounter with the enemy. On 21 March the Cavalry Brigade scouted the Atbara south of the fort. The main force halted at Abadar. Two squadrons, with Haig accompanying them, then patrolled further south. They were followed on their return to the camp by a small Dervish force. The enemy had cleverly eluded the advanced outposts and was in position to harass the main body of troops. By revealing only a small portion of their force, the Dervishes enticed a squadron of cavalry to pursue them into the scrub. An ambush resulted, causing ten killed and eight wounded among the Anglo-Egyptian force. After the successful ambush, the Dervishes quickly and characteristically withdrew. Their losses were slight.

Though he should not be faulted for the impression it had upon him, the incident received more emphasis in Haig's diary and letters than it probably deserved. Nevertheless, the conclusions which he drew are significant:

1. The outpost service, tho' theoretically right, was carelessly done. When I passed the picket in question, many were lying down, apparently asleep.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 15 March 1898. Though this would appear to be a dramatic reversal of his hitherto mysogony, it was actually a purely pragmatic approach to fighting a war with largely untrained, native contingents.



2. The eyesight of the Egyptian vedette can't be relied on. For the Dervishes passed the front line of vedettes.
3. The pluck of the Egyptian cavalryman is right enough in my opinion.
4. The Horse Artillery against enemy of this sort is no use. We felt the want of machine guns when working along side of scrub for searching some of the tracks.<sup>1</sup>

Point number three is especially important. This was Haig's response to the critics of the Egyptian Cavalry. The point referring to machine guns is also significant. After the Great War, critics accused Haig of having rejected the gun as a viable weapon.<sup>2</sup> Yet just prior to his departure for the Sudan, he notably took a special trip to Enfield to study the Maxim gun.<sup>3</sup> During the campaign he repeatedly commented upon its indispensibility.

After this first encounter with the enemy, though evidently not as a result of it, Haig was finally given a formal appointment. On 25 March the Commander of the Cavalry Brigade, Kamaikim R. G. Broadwood, made Haig his staff officer. Broadwood was probably as perturbed as Haig at Kitchener's indecision. He recognised Haig's enormous potential as a staff officer. The post was a prestigious one. It was in line with his earlier experience with Keith Fraser and his staff appointments in various Army manoeuvres. But it also meant that command of a unit in battle--experience which Haig desperately needed--was denied him. His knowledge of the behaviour of soldiers in battle consequently suffered.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 26 March 1898.

<sup>2</sup>See especially C. D. Baker-Carr, From Chauffeur to Brigadier, (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), pp. 71-101. There is a file in the Haig Papers (Acc. 3155, No. 337-1) which contains a memorandum by Terraine on this point. He refers to a letter by Liddell Hart in support of Baker-Carr's assertion that Haig felt 'the machine gun was a much over-rated weapon'. Terraine admirably refutes the statement. Though Haig's cavalry background may have adversely influenced his use of the weapon, he never doubted its worth.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 19 January 1898.

As March progressed, Mahmoud retreated southward in hopes of lengthening the Anglo-Egyptian line of communication and enticing Kitchener into making mistakes. Haig, as a staff officer, joined a number of reconnaissance patrols which scouted the Dervish position. On one of these, a much more serious clash with the enemy occurred. On 5 April, the entire Cavalry Brigade, with horse artillery, two maxim batteries, and camel corps, reconnoitred the Dervish position at Nukheila. The force had viewed the right of the camp, when General Hunter<sup>1</sup> ordered a move to the left. As the force retired in order to move in that direction, it was attacked. One group of Dervish cavalry advanced on the Anglo-Egyptian flank from upstream, while another blocked the line of retreat by advancing from a position downstream. At the same time the Dervish infantry left their trenches for a frontal assault. 'The situation was a difficult one', Haig admitted, 'and to add to it a strongish north wind prevented our seeing clearly the moment a squadron moved.'<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent events are not entirely clear. The only eyewitness account which can be found is Haig's. He therefore naturally takes centre stage in the description of the action. It nevertheless appears that he performed admirably:

I had just been to Baring to get him into a position on the right of the guns to cover them during our withdrawal when I noticed our left rear (Le Gallais) attacked. Broadwood was at the left of the guns retiring at a trot. I galloped to him and told him the left rear was strongly attacked. He could not see this from where he was because of the dust. Broadwood attacked with the two squadrons (Le Gallais), and fortunately the enemy (infantry and cavalry mingled) gave way before us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>General Archibald Hunter was Commander of the Egyptian Army. Kitchener was Commander-in-Chief of the Sudan Campaign. When Kitchener assumed this position, Hunter's duties became quite naturally confused.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



After the initial disaster had been averted, Broadwood sent Haig to look after the horse artillery. The battery was found 'trotting gaily to the rear'. In the same vicinity Haig found Captain Mahon, in charge of three cavalry squadrons:

Mahon . . . said 'I can't see what has happened, what do you suggest?' I at once said 'Place one squadron on flank of guns and support Le Gallais with your other two on his left. I will then bring Baring and remaining three squadrons on your left rear as a third line.' Mahon advanced. I gave Baring his orders, putting all three squadrons under him. I then galloped on to find Broadwood (who I knew must be with Le Gallais' squadrons) in order to know his wishes as to the actions of the guns. On my way I found the two squadrons coming back at full gallop. We were able to stop them . . . and they advanced a little way. I thought there was no time to lose to ask for orders so I went direct to the maxims and told them they must come into action against the most threatening of the enemy (which I indicated) as soon as the cavalry cleared the field of fire.

Haig returned to Broadwood, apprised him of the situation, and advised him to lead a flank attack. When Broadwood's men cleared the field, the Maxims poured a deadly fire on the Dervish lines. The plan worked perfectly. 'We were able to fight our way out of the infantry fire.'

Allowing for the inevitable embroidery, it is clear that Haig played a major part in averting a rout. 'Broadwood was much obliged to me for my assistance and told the Sirdar so<sup>1</sup>, he wrote. Kitchener responded by awarding him a Brevet Majority. Haig's steadiness in the midst of utter confusion was the most notable feature of his performance. The role of leader seems to have come naturally to him. His conduct was unlike that of an officer in only his second action. Yet Haig was not surprised by his performance. The aplomb in his letters is unmistakeable. Even the danger of the situation did not affect him, as evidenced by the

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<sup>1</sup>All the quotations on this page are from the 11 April 1898 letter to Henrietta.

reassurances given to Henrietta:

You say that you are anxious . . . That is all nonsense, because neither the Dervish horseman nor the bullets of their infantry worry me in the least.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude seems foolish, but it was probably genuine. Courage is sometimes simply a blatant disregard of danger. Haig's courage was partially of this type. It was undoubtedly considerable. His bravery arose in part from a sincere belief that he was destined for greatness. He seems to have been unable to consider the possibility of an insignificant death in the Sudan.

'Our casualties', wrote Haig, 'were pretty severe, 30 wounded and ten killed'.<sup>2</sup> Yet the action was a valuable test of the Egyptian cavalry, who were immensely proud of their performance. This time, Haig was not impressed:

The Gypsie Cavalry acted steadily on the whole, but there was no glorious charging home, as some of the tales I have heard would have us believe. Moreover, if the Dervish horsemen had really come on, I feel sure that few of the Brigade would have escaped. Indeed General Hunter gave it as his opinion just before the maxims opened fire, he thought a 'sauve qui peut' must be the only ending. However all's well that ends well and the Gypsie Cavalry are considered heroes. That is rubbish . . .<sup>3</sup>

The only performance which Haig praised was his own. He felt that his action had averted disaster. His commanding officer, on the other hand, had nearly caused a catastrophe. 'He, Broadwood, was wrong to charge as he did with the front line, for the whole Brigade then passed from his control.'<sup>4</sup> Here Haig revealed one of his pet aversions: the cavalry officer so eager for glory that he loses sight of his responsibilities as a leader. But Haig forgave Broadwood

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<sup>1</sup> Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Haig to Wood, 12 April 1898.

<sup>4</sup> Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898.



this momentary lapse. 'He is a very sound fellow and is excellent at running this show.'<sup>1</sup>

From Haig's account, it seems clear that the Maxims stabilised the situation enough to effect an orderly retreat. If this was the case, he did not emphasise the fact. For him, the action demonstrated the lightning effect which cavalry could produce. Once order had been restored, momentum shifted away from the Dervishes. They 'ran away the moment we showed a bold front.'<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of the arme blanche had, for Haig, been vindicated in a single action lasting less than an hour. First impressions of this magnitude and type are highly significant. It is interesting to speculate what effect an outright disaster might have had. The importance of 5 April was enhanced by the fact that Haig took part in no further cavalry actions of equal intensity for the duration of the campaign. The remaining battles were static ones involving little scope for the arme blanche. No other experiences in the Sudan rivaled this one in its effect upon Haig.

The Battle of the Atbara followed two days later. Through cavalry reconnaissance, the Dervish position had become well known. Kitchener moved his entire force to within 600 yards of the enemy and then waited for something to happen. The Dervish force reacted like a cornered animal. First their cavalry made a disordered attempt to harass the Anglo-Egyptian lines. Broadwood's men cleared the enemy cavalry from the field and then retired for the day. The Maxims and artillery took over, and softened the Dervish trenches. After a suitable interval, the infantry advanced. Mahmoud

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

was confronted by a force superior to his own in numbers, organisation and technology. His men reacted by bolting. The Anglo-Egyptian casualties numbered 650, the Dervish over 2500. Mahmoud was among the captured.

Haig sent Wood a detailed critique of the action. Since his role was over early, he had 'a good view of what took place'.<sup>1</sup> He was not pleased:

. . . why was the attack frontal? It seemed to me, from the very first day that we reconnoitered the place, that an attack on the enemy's right offered great advantages. The enemy would have been forced to retreat across the open desert to the Nile without being allowed time to fill water skins, etc. . . .

Next what about the use made of the Artillery? Distant fire was not required: in fact the first and only range was some 700 yards. Our side says the guns did tremendous damage! Mahmoud and 'over 30 men' (Enemy) questioned by Fitton (who is sort of an Intelligence Officer here) say 'We did not mind the guns, they only hurt camels and donkeys . . .'

Another point is the formation of the force for the attack. . . . Looking on, it struck me that our formation was extraordinarily<sup>2</sup> deep. This may have accounted for our severe losses.

Haig included a battle plan of his own. He would have placed the neglected cavalry, an infantry brigade and some guns on the opposite side of the river. This force would have enfiladed the enemy lines and cut off their escape route. The main attack, by only two brigades ('as many . . . as the frontage admitted'<sup>3</sup>) would have been concentrated on the enemy's right.

Haig admitted that his plan was faulty because it included an unjustified assumption:

The weak point in my plan is that I calculate as if I had troops that can shoot and manoeuvre! It would be

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<sup>1</sup> Haig to Wood, 29 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



unwise to rely on the blacks doing either well. So all the more credit is due to the Sirdar for limiting himself to a more moderate victory instead of going for annihilating the Mahmoud's army.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the above reservations, Haig's plan reflects a significant difference in attitude between himself and Kitchener. The engineer was basically a siege commander. His plan took into account an erratic enemy who did not fight according to classical patterns. Kitchener manoeuvred his army into a safe position from which he could handle any eventuality. Victory came easily but not brilliantly. Kitchener allowed many Dervishes to escape. Haig's plan was more in accord with classical patterns. It climaxed with the bold release of the cavalry and aimed at annihilation. Haig abhorred the moderate victory which allowed the enemy to fight again. His plan was the product of his cavalry mind.<sup>2</sup>

Haig ended his letter to Wood with a significant criticism of the medical facilities during the battle:

The wounded . . . have had a terrible time. The formation of a hospital at Vindabia and Abadar for a week immediately after the battle would have saved many a limb, not to say lives. As it was, the Drs. had to march all night and dress the wounded by day.<sup>3</sup>

Haig's criticisms were echoed in the press at home. Kitchener's economies had caused him to cut medical services to the absolute minimum. In a letter to Henrietta, Haig maintained that there was not a single stretcher bearer with the British Brigade. The wounded were carried solely by the Egyptians. These 'poor creatures . . . were so fatigued that they slept as they stood at every short halt

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 29 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig was both aggressive and conservative. He aimed at annihilation, but could not easily depart from classical patterns. Thus, in the Great War, when deprived of the use of the cavalry, his exploitative arm, his conduct of the war was basically conservative. These points will be emphasised in subsequent chapters, and the epilogue, pp. 364-365.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Wood, 19 April 1898.

during the night on the return march with the wounded.<sup>1</sup> Despite the overwhelming evidence of cruel shortages, Haig quite curiously reserved judgement on Kitchener's guilt. 'It is a pity to be too severe on what could not have been foreseen'<sup>2</sup>, he maintained. He did not, however, explain why the need for provisions for the wounded could not have been foreseen. In light of his usual eagerness to criticise his superiors, his reluctance here seems strange.

Though the Battle of the Atbara provided little scope for cavalry heroism, Haig did have his moment of glory. He described it in a letter to Henrietta:

. . . when the squadrons were retiring just before the Maxims came into action, I was able to pick up a poor wretch of an Egyptian who was wounded in the shoulder and had given himself up for lost, and put him in front of my saddle and carried him to the guns where we had some spare horses and the Dr. was . . . In doing this I did not incur the slightest danger, tho' there is no doubt that had I not taken this man the dervishes would have got him.<sup>3</sup>

The incident was related to a newspaper artist with the force, who sketched his interpretation. The drawing, which bears little resemblance to Haig but is indeed supposed to be him, appeared in the Graphic on 28 May 1898.

The Battle of the Atbara was followed by a victory celebration in Berber. Haig ridiculed the plans in a letter to his sister:

Tomorrow the Sirdar is to make a triumphal entry into Berber--a sort of Roman triumph with Mahmoud tied to his horse's tail I suppose. The order is to 'decorate Berber! A lot of mud walls and dust and only palms available for the job!'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 10 June 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



Phillip Magnus mentions that Kitchener was immensely proud of his achievement, and considered it the turning point of his career.<sup>1</sup> The Sirdar's pride was evident to Haig. He described the victory ceremony in his diary on 13 April:

Triumphal entry of the Sirdar into Berber at 7 a.m.

5 Squadrons Cavalry met him on S. side of town and guard of honour of 100 men.

Sirdar arrived with Cavalry escort. The latter fell back and 1st Bde. preceded by dervish prisoners headed by Mahmoud followed Sirdar through Berber. In front of Mahmoud was calico screen with inscription: 'This is Mahmoud, the commander of the Army which said it was going to capture Berber.'

After 1st Bde followed the Artillery, then Cavalry. The natives lined the road and cheered.

Finally the Sirdar halted under the Dais in the market place and saw troops pass.<sup>2</sup>

Magnus describes how Kitchener rode into Berber on a white horse, followed by Mahmoud, collared and chained. Natives were instructed to throw stones at the Emir.<sup>3</sup> Though Haig's ceremonies in the Great War were full of grandeur, he found spectacles like the above vulgar. He apparently did not believe they had anything to do with fighting a war. Haig's imperialistic emotions were always more muted than Kitchener's. He believed that, even in war against savages, certain moral standards had to be maintained.

Haig's most virulent scorn was directed at the Press.

He found Bennet Burleigh of the Daily Telegraph--the most famous of the war's correspondents--a particularly loathsome 'creature'. After the battle he commented on the

. . . rubbish the British public delights to read. The exaggeration of some of the reports almost makes a good

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<sup>1</sup>Phillip Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 13 April 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Magnus, Kitchener, p. 122.

day's work appear ridiculous. The headings of the D.T. are so overdrawn that instinctively one says 'Waterloo Eclipsed'.<sup>1</sup>

He was horrified when Henrietta asked him to assist Hugo Depree, a cousin who wanted to go to the Sudan as a correspondent:

I think my letters to you and Jenty will have shown the class of creature which represents the press in this part of the world. . . . The idea of coming as a correspondent is absurd. Briefly my reasons are first: the Sirdar has no intention of having a thorough criticism of his methods. So the correspondents are only allowed to see and report what he chooses. 2ndly: The class of correspondent is so very low indeed (only one man, Stevens of 'Daily Mail' at all educated as a gentleman) that I should be sorry to have to live, mess, and spend long days with such. 3rdly: The work performed by all newspaper correspondents is most degrading: they can't tell the whole truth even if they want to do so. The British public likes to read sensational news, and the best war correspondent is he who can tell the most thrilling lies.<sup>2</sup>

This was Haig's first real encounter with the Press. His surprise was as great as when he later began to have dealings with politicians. He simply could not understand the values, motives and habits of individuals of a class so completely different from his own.

The Battle of the Atbara was followed by four months of extensive preparations for the final assault. The next move was to be in the direction of Khartoum and Omdurman, where the Khalifa's main force was situated. Kitchener's prestige had risen sharply as a result of the success of 7 April. He used this prestige to press for additional support: four British battalions, a cavalry regiment, an engineer company and additional artillery and auxiliary corps. All demands were met. The Anglo-Egyptian strength was considerable. The force, however, needed to be properly trained and coordinated before it could be used in battle. During the period

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 29 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 June 1898.



of preparation, Haig finally received a squadron of his own. His duties brought him satisfaction and enjoyment:

You would be surprised at how quickly the time passes here: I have 35 young horses now, making 148 in all in my squadron. I have a parade every morning except Friday (which is the Egyptian Sunday) and sometimes I have the young horses out in the afternoon as well. We have an unlimited drill ground (from here to Suakim) compare that with Wormwood Scrubbs, Hounslow Heath and Wimbledon Common for training Cavalry! So I have grand manoeuvres against men with flags to represent an Enemy --not exactly dervish tactics, but still if a squadron can keep together at rapid paces one is all right against Dervishes!<sup>1</sup>

He proved an excellent squadron leader. On 16 July 'the Sirdar', he noted, 'came round riding with General Rundle. Introduced me to latter. Complimented me on improvement in squadron.'<sup>2</sup>

The period was one of hard work coupled with much relaxation and entertainment. The troops took part in shooting, fishing, racing, polo and other sports. For Haig, life continued to be as comfortable and enjoyable as he could make it. In July, the parcels from Henrietta arrived, including three cases of champagne. The added baggage required extra men and animals. 'War' seemed good for him:

For myself they all say I look far better than I ever did in England. The days are hot, but the nights are cold. That is to say, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. the climate is excellent. I have the squadron to play with in the morning and three days a week play polo. At present we have not got our fizzy water yet and the soda water machine has broken down. Still the Nile water is excellent at this date. We filter it and cool it. This with sour claret is excellent.<sup>3</sup>

There were also the inevitable diversions which arise during war. These included a murder trial in which Haig served as Chief Prosecuting Attorney. He noted with particular emphasis that a

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 July 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 16 July 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 29 April 1898.

woman--'called Guz, a shrill voiced, ugly wench'<sup>1</sup>--was at the centre of the controversy. The trial provided considerable interest for Haig. It ended with the successful conviction of a fellaheen, who was subsequently executed.

During the build-up to the final battle, Haig continued to place unwarranted store in rumours of the enemy's condition. On 21 April he speculated that an insurrection in Omdurman was likely.<sup>2</sup> He recorded the same belief a while later.<sup>3</sup> On 5 June, he wrote the following to Henrietta:

You ask about Khartoum. Some deserters arrived here yesterday direct from there. They say . . . murders in the streets and fighting amongst the Emirs. But of course one can't say whether they are speaking the truth or not. Still there is just a chance of the Khalifa's power breaking up entirely.<sup>4</sup>

He ended the letter by remarking that it was more likely the troops would fight to the last. Yet he was consistently credulous when confronted with idle gossip. Rumours of the enemy's condition serve no use whatsoever. They can easily mislead an army commander as to the nature of the problem confronting him, and often spawn unjustified optimism.

In July, Kitchener slowly moved his force forward to Wadi Hamed, about seventy miles from Omdurman. Haig still commanded a squadron, as he did for the rest of the campaign. His squadron was one of the last to reach the camp, arriving on 11 August. At Wadi Hamed, Haig found a 'muddle' which further shook his confidence in Kitchener. Two diary entries show his frustration:

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 19 May 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 21 April 1898.

<sup>3</sup>See Haig to Henrietta, 1 May 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 June 1898.



11 August:

Great delay and much bungling in laying our camp. Had to shift my squadron lines three times.

12 August:

Again shifted our lines!!! Is this good staff work?<sup>1</sup>

He detailed his criticisms in a letter to Wood:

I'll merely remark that I shifted my squadron lines 3 times on the 11th and once on the 12th of August. My experience is not singular in this respect. Nor indeed did this delay in settling down occur merely in this one camp, but it was the chief feature whenever the force or any part (except Cavalry alone) moved. The cause was due to the fact that the Officer in Chief Command for the time being (be he the Sirdar or Hunter) insisted on doing every detail himself, in place of trusting a staff officer to allot the camping areas to units.<sup>2</sup>

Haig found Kitchener's methods increasingly difficult to tolerate.

His frustration was similar to that experienced by David Lloyd

George and William Robertson in the Great War. Their experiences

helped to explode the myth of Kitchener as a brilliant military

leader. Yet in 1898, Kitchener's prestige remained formidable,

and Haig was one of few to question it.

The Battle of Omdurman broke out on 2 September. For the preceeding few days, the opposing armies had manoeuvred into position. The Dervishes were situated on a plain north of the city. Their position was bordered by two strategic heights: the Kerreri Hills to the north and Jebel Surgham to the south. Their

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 11 and 12 August 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Wood, 7 September 1898. It is interesting to note how openly Haig criticises his superior officers, especially Kitchener. It is true that Wood asked for Haig's opinions, but his eagerness to give them is startling. Witness his comment in the 29 April letter to Wood: 'You must not think that I am trying to find points to criticise (I'll tell you much more when I get back!). But as I owe my presence here to your kindness, it pleases me to write to you and tell you of any odd event which may not otherwise reach you except with the accopanism[sic] of an official colouring.' Haig was fulfilling perfectly (and apparently enjoying) Wood's intended purpose for him.

force was divided in two, the southern group led by the Khalifa and the northern by his son, Osma Sheikh ed Din. Their plan--if one existed--seemed to call for a flank attack by the Khalifa, followed closely by a frontal assault by his son. The Anglo-Egyptian force was situated between the Dervish position and the river, supported by a number of gunboats.<sup>1</sup> The Sirdar's plan was as sketchy as the Khalifa's. As had been the case at the Atbara, Kitchener moved his force into a strong position and then left the next move to his enemy. The battle, naturally enough, turned into a defensive one for the Anglo-Egyptian force. The Dervishes threw themselves first in one direction, then in another. The attacks were well ordered, but an overall strategy was missing. Haig was impressed with the enemy's courage. They 'seemed to come in countless numbers and in rank after rank. . . . their order and manoeuvring power was wonderful.'<sup>2</sup> To Henrietta he confessed that 'I could not have believed it possible for human beings to advance in the way they did against such a fire.'<sup>3</sup> The battle soon deteriorated into a series of mindless, bloody assaults which were successfully repulsed by the stiff Anglo-Egyptian defence. The superior firepower and organisation of the Sirdar's force caused the Dervish strength gradually to dissolve. The Khalifa's men had suffered enormous losses. Faced with complete annihilation, they chose to run.

In his study, Falls points out that had the Khalifa been able to concentrate both wings of his force in a simultaneous attack,

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<sup>1</sup>One of the gunboats was commanded by David Beatty, later Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty of the North Sea.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 2 September 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 6 September 1898



'obviously the risks and the trials of the Sirdar's troops would have been far heavier.'<sup>1</sup> Haig made virtually the same point in a letter to Wood. He believed the battle had been lost by the Khalifa, not won by Kitchener. He described how the Dervish leader erred by not siezing the two strategic heights. 'What losses would we not have suffered in turning him out?'<sup>2</sup> He also maintained that Kitchener failed to capitalise on the enemy's divided force:

. . . the Sirdar's left should have been thrown forward . . . and gradually drawing in his right and extending his left south-westwards, he might have cut the enemy off from Omdurman and really annihilated the thousands and thousands of Dervishes. In place of this, altho' in possession of full information, and able to see with his own eyes the whole field, he spreads out his force, thereby risking destruction of a Brigade. He seems to have had no plan, or tactical idea, beyond allowing the latter to attack the camp.<sup>3</sup>

Kitchener was criticised for over-caution at the time of the battle and since. Yet his strategy probably accounts for the low casualty figure of 48 killed and 434 wounded. Haig's plan, another example of his preference for the aggressive offensive, may indeed have 'annihilated . . . thousands and thousands of Dervishes'. But the cost probably would have been higher. As it was, 11,000 Dervishes were killed, over one-quarter of their force.

Haig was especially disappointed with the handling of the cavalry. The first attacks by the Dervishes were repulsed by the cavalry, but otherwise they played little part in the action. When the Dervish forces dissolved and fled, Kitchener regrouped his men for the final advance. He was eager to reach Omdurman before

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<sup>1</sup>Falls, 'The Reconquest of the Sudan', p. 298. The description of the battle and the statistics on casualties are taken from this source.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Wood, 7 September 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

nightfall. The cavalry, eager for glory, was allowed to attempt a dramatic charge into the city. A frontal assault was impossible as the battle field was littered with individual Dervishes who were still fighting. It was decided that the Cavalry Brigade should attempt to skirt the resistance by approaching the city in a wide arc from the south. Haig took off in a group of three squadrons, but soon found the task impossible. They were fired on from all directions. Dervishes who seemed to have surrendered shot at the cavalry after it had passed. 'My men seemed to bend their heads as one does to escape a storm of rain!', he wrote. 'I had seen 8 horses go down on my front rank . . .'<sup>1</sup> The advance was abandoned. The three squadrons, cut off from the rest of the brigade, retired to the river where they spent the night. A number of horses died of exhaustion; others had to be shot. No supplies were available until late the next day when a cargo boat--after extreme difficulty--finally manoeuvred to the shore. Haig did not arrive in Omdurman until 4 September. By that time the excitement of victory had abated. He was tired, hungry and disappointed. He was also extremely angry with those who had ordered the charge. 'It was a ridiculous idea for three squadrons to attack some 10 or more thousands of armed and resolute men all scattered across the plain.'<sup>2</sup>

The battle demonstrated how, in the pursuit of glory, men often lose their common sense. Nowhere was this more evident than in the cavalry, much to Haig's annoyance. The cavalry could not afford such fools. One man whom Haig singled out was Colonel Martin, commanding officer of the 21st Lancers. The Lancers, among

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 2 September 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



them Winston Churchill,<sup>1</sup> had joined the campaign when Kitchener strengthened his force after the Battle of the Atbara. They operated independently of the Egyptian Cavalry Brigade. Martin and the Lancers were eager to make a mark. Unfortunately, they chose the wrong occasion to do so. The consequences were disastrous. Churchill described how Colonel Martin, on the basis of intelligence he should have realised was faulty, decided to charge a Dervish position, with the result that

. . . before [the distance] was half-covered, the whole aspect of the affair changed. A deep crease in the ground--a dry water course, a khor--appeared where all had seemed smooth, level plain; and from it there sprang, with the suddenness of a pantomime effect and a high pitched yell, a dense white mass of men nearly as long as our front and twelve deep . . . The collision was prodigious.<sup>2</sup>

The charge of the 21st Lancers resembled that of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in both magnificence and futility. Sixty-five men and 119 horses were killed or wounded in less than two minutes, attacking a position which was of no strategic importance. As if to encourage similar actions, three Victoria Crosses were later awarded.

Haig was a firm believer in the moral effect of the cavalry charge. But he always felt that the charge had to have an object other than simply glory. He vented his anger with Martin in a letter to Wood:

You will hear a lot of the charge made by the 21st Lancers. . . . The regiment seems to have advanced without any patrols in front . . . While in column of troops they were

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<sup>1</sup>Haig was against Churchill joining the force. See Diary, 12 July 1898: 'Le Gallais and I are sent for by the Sirdar at 12 noon. He told us that he was much bothered by people with influence forcing useless officers on him. Asked if I thought young Churchill suitable. Said I did not want him in my squadron. . . .' Haig did not explain his lack of enthusiasm for Churchill.

<sup>2</sup>Winston Churchill, The River War, (London: Longmans, Green and Co.: 1899), Vol. II, pp. 135-136.

under a hot fire, so [Martin's] suspicions ought to have been aroused especially as Slatin before had told him of the nullah. . . . The loss inflicted on the enemy (judging by the corpses) was trifling, 14 or 15 at most. . . . We onlookers in the Egyptian Cavalry have feared this all along, for the regiment was keen to do something and meant to charge something before the show was over. They got their charge, but at what cost? I trust for the sake of the British Cavalry that more tactical knowledge exists in the higher ranks of the average regiment than we have seen displayed in this one. Yet this Commanding Officer has had his command extended. . . . Really I cannot think that the Promotion Board fully appreciates the responsibility which rests<sup>1</sup> with them when they put duffers in command of regiments.

Earlier, Haig had pointed out that good officers could turn the fellaheen into an adequate cavalryman. Here he showed how 'duffers' could destroy valuable men and horses. Wise leadership was at the heart of successful cavalry. Selfish nonsense was not to be tolerated.

On 4 September, a moving service was read for Gordon in Khartoum. Kitchener was so affected by it that he shook with sobs. The dignity of the event was tarnished two days later when the Sirdar ordered the destruction of the Mahdi's tomb. The great leader's corpse was exhumed. The body was burned and thrown in the Nile, and the skull presented as a trophy to Kitchener. Some of his close associates suggested that he mount it in silver or gold, to be used as a drinking cup or inkstand. Kitchener, impressed by the unusual size of the skull, toyed with the idea of sending it to the Royal College of Surgeons. The suggestion caused a great outcry in Britain. The subject was raised in Parliament. Finally the Sirdar relented. The skull was secretly buried in a small cemetery

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Wood, 7 September 1898. Haig was incorrect in his statement that Martin had had his command extended. Kitchener removed him not long after the event, and gave command of the regiment to Major R. G. Cole-Wyndham.



near Wadi Halfa.<sup>1</sup>

Haig missed the memorial service due to his late arrival in Omdurman. He did not apparently regret his absence. He only briefly mentioned the issue of the skull, as if to show his distaste for the whole affair. The war was over and he felt that his job was done. He ridiculed officers who wished to stay in the Sudan with the Egyptian Army, in the hopes of decoration or promotion. 'To me there were no such fancies',<sup>2</sup> he claimed. He was eager to return to Britain, where Wood had reserved him a position at the Horse Guards. He described his feelings in a letter to the Adjutant General dated 21 September:

I thank you very much indeed for your kindness in saying you would like to get some work for me to do at the Horse Guards. I think that in spite of the feeling in this Army against new arrivals that they will give one credit for training my squadron and doing my best always for the show, not for myself. I don't want credit for it because it pleased me and kept me well during the trying heat at Berber all summer. Now I think this show is pretty well over and though I am ready to remain if the Sirdar requires a Squadron leader, I think your kindly advice about slackness in hot countries very much to the point and I am ready to come home in any minor capacity.<sup>3</sup>

In a subsequent letter, the last from Egypt, he emphasised the experience he had gained. 'For all this I have only you to thank'.<sup>4</sup> He left Omdurman on 17 September and arrived in London eighteen days later.

Haig was right to stress the experience he had gained. The campaign proved that he could lead in a crisis. It demonstrated the

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<sup>1</sup>See Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, pp. 131-134 for a description of the controversy surrounding the Mahdi's skull.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Wood, 21 September 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Wood, 7 September 1898.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Wood, 21 September 1898.

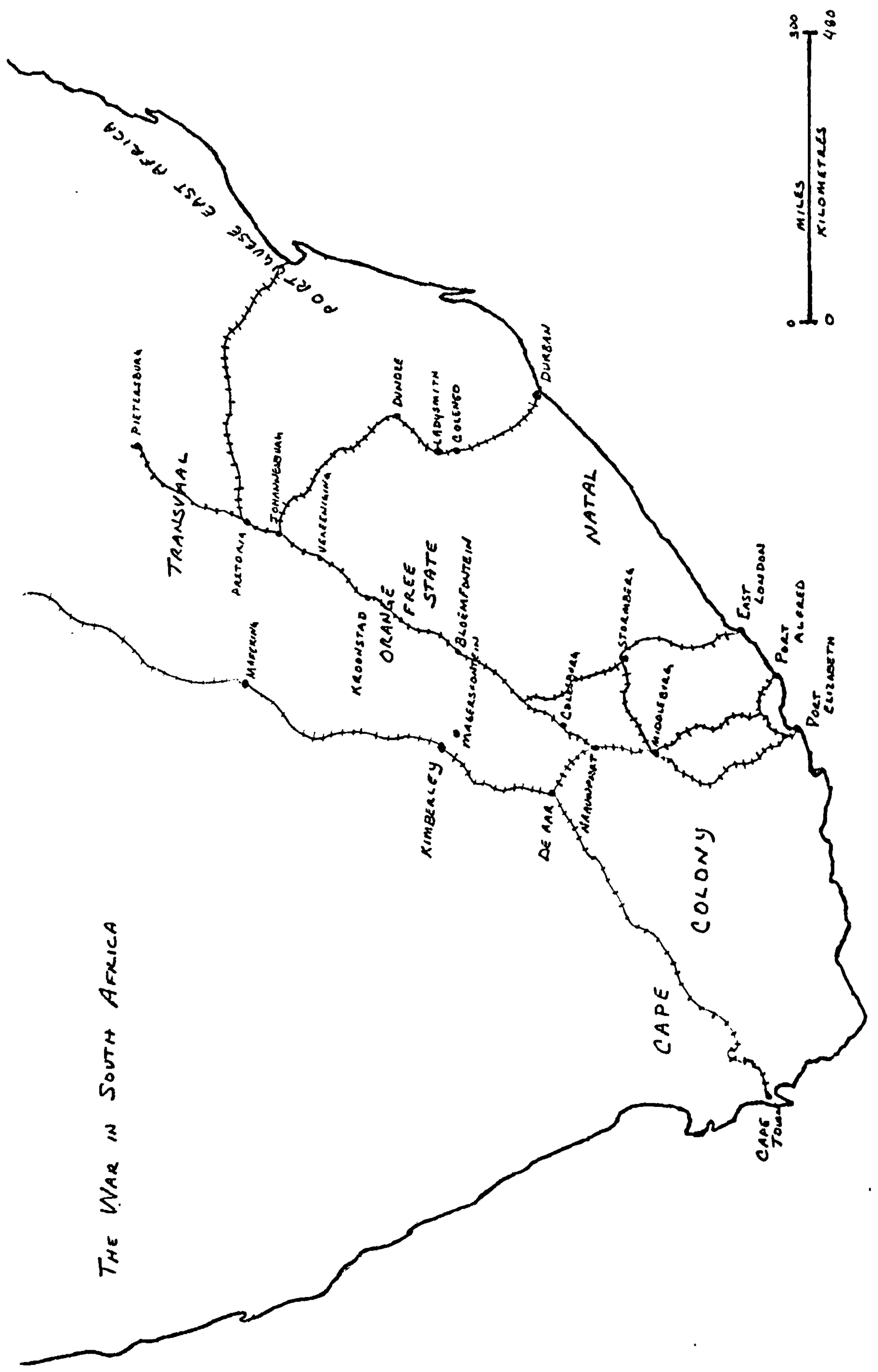
value of discipline, organisation and training. It showed what good cavalry could accomplish and what foolish leadership could destroy. More importantly, the war proved that control of a battle could only be maintained through an aggressive offence. None of these ideas were new to Haig. The war did not surprise him. There were perhaps only three unexpected experiences. The first was his encounter with the Press. The second was the behaviour of men eager for glory. The third, and most significant, was the performance of Kitchener, who was supposed to have been a 'great' leader, but whom Haig found disorganised, inefficient and at times incompetent. Otherwise, the war confirmed old doctrines rather than introducing new ones. It provided Haig with the added impetus to pursue even more resolutely the approach to his profession which he had long ago assumed.



## CHAPTER VI

The Boer War, 1898-1902

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA





The campaign in the Sudan was a disappointing one for the British cavalry. Reconnaissance and protective duties were performed adequately. But Kitchener's strategy and the limitations of the fellaheen reduced to a minimum the arm's offensive capacity. In addition, vain, weak leaders caused disasters which damaged the cavalry's reputation. In spite of this showing, Haig's faith in the arm was not affected. He was able to explain and accept every failure without weakening his basic belief that the arm remained an indispensable moral weapon. This faith was rewarded in South Africa, or so it seemed to Haig. As will be seen over the next three chapters, opinions regarding the performance and contribution of the cavalry in the Boer War differ widely.<sup>1</sup> But what is important to this study is how traditionalists like Haig perceived their role in the war. To them, the war was an indisputable affirmation of the importance of cavalry trained along traditional lines. It was due to their experiences in South Africa that cavalrymen like Haig were able to resist all serious efforts at modernising their arm prior to 1914.

Haig returned to Britain in the autumn of 1898 and rejoined the 7th Hussars at Norwich.<sup>2</sup> Life was tedious after the excitement of the Sudan. His fortunes changed in May 1899 when he was appointed Brigade Major of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, Aldershot. The appointment was a well-deserved reward for Haig's services in the Sudan. But, as in January 1898, there was an unseemly side to Haig's selection.

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Spiers, in an excellent article on the post-Boer War cavalry controversy, points out that 'the South African War did not produce any self-evident lessons, only a range of common experiences, liable to whatever interpretation suited the subjective preferences of the interpreter.' See Spiers, 'The British Cavalry 1902-1914', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Vol. 57, No. 230, (Summer 1979), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>The position which Wood promised Haig at the Horse Guards did not materialise. It is not known why.

The commander of the Aldershot Brigade was Colonel (temporary Major General) John French. French was on the verge of bankruptcy, as a result of unwise speculation in South African mining shares. In the same month as his selection as Brigade Major, Haig agreed to loan French £2500 to satisfy the most impatient creditors. Had French been declared bankrupt, his career would have been ruined. The loan was perfectly legitimate--a formal contract was signed and an interest agreed upon--yet there is no doubt that it tied Haig to French in an unorthodox manner. Haig explained why he was willing to loan the money in a letter to his sister:

It would be a terrible thing if French were made a Bankrupt --such a loss to the Army as well as to me personally. For of course we can do a lot here together towards improving things.<sup>1</sup>

Haig could not have been more correct. As subsequent events proved, Haig gained immensely by French remaining solvent. The £2500 was a worthwhile investment in his career and in the cavalry.<sup>2</sup>

Haig spent only four months at Aldershot. He devoted himself to his duties, and brought about notable improvements in the Brigade. On 14 September, French was selected to command the cavalry in the force preparing for war in South Africa. Six days later, Haig was confirmed as his Chief Staff Officer, or Assistant Adjutant General

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 16 May 1899.

<sup>2</sup>The loan was finally repaid ten years later, despite French's problems in meeting the payments. See Haig to Henrietta, 9 December 1903: 'I am astonished at what you say, re the loan to General F. . . . I am afraid the trustees have been hustling for payment and in fact I felt I would prefer to lose the money myself than that General F. should be pressed for it.' A rare bit of charity on Haig's part. French's predicament in 1898 did not, however, cause him to shy away from similar investments in the future. By 1901, he was again speculating on the South African gold market, this time, however, with the perhaps more secure guidance of Lt. Col. Brinsley Fitzgerald, his A.D.C. See French to Fitzgerald, 30 October 1901, Fitzgerald Papers, PP/MCR/118/2/4.



(A.A.G.). Hardly a year after the Battle of Omdurman, Haig was again on his way to war. During the passage on the S. S. Norman, he commented on this fact in a letter to Henrietta:

You and I always seem to be saying 'Goodbye' to each other, and yet practice in this does not seem to make the process easier but rather more trying.<sup>1</sup>

The emotions were characteristically set aside once they had been expressed. Haig settled into the voyage, and used his spare time to prepare mentally for the war. French generously gave Haig a room in his cabin, which meant that he avoided the regular berths, which were 'smaller than most dog kennels'.<sup>2</sup> There was a strange collection of passengers on the ship: 'Uitlanders, Boers . . . Newspaper Correspondents, and some 20 or 30 soldiers'.<sup>3</sup> Included in the latter were two of Paul Kruger's nephews. The irony of men travelling together for 17 days in order to fight each other on the other side of the world escaped Haig's mention.

He arrived in Cape Town on 10 October, at which time he heard that the Boers had demanded the withdrawal of all British troops by the following day. 'It is generally agreed', Haig wrote, 'that even Lord Salisbury cannot knuckle under to this piece of Boer swagger . . .'.<sup>4</sup> He was eager to begin fighting, but complications caused delay. The overland route to East London, where the cavalry was gathered, was closed. Haig and French as a result had to wait

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 September 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 23 September 1899. It should be noted that the Boer War Diaries (part of 1899, all of 1900, and part of 1901) are kept separate from the other diaries in the Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 38. The diary for 1901 is incomplete, and the one for 1902 is missing.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 10 October 1899.

for the next available steamer to take them to Durban. They spent their time 'hanging about the Staff Office'<sup>1</sup>--both considerably frustrated. Haig blamed the delay on 'the actions of Govt. officials, i.e. a general want of foresight all round! e.g. deficiency of troops in South Africa!!!'<sup>2</sup> The early news of the siege of British troops in Mafeking compounded his annoyance.

Haig and French finally arrived in Durban on 18 October. The force they found on their arrival consisted of the garrison troops, supplemented by local volunteers. The latter were of uncertain quality. The total British force in Durban was composed of four cavalry regiments, eleven infantry battalions, six field artillery batteries, and 2,000 irregular horse, raised in the Colony. During the waiting period in Cape Town, Haig prepared a document which suggested possible uses for the mounted troops. The document was presented to General Forrester-Walker, the local commander. In it Haig demonstrated a remarkable understanding of Boer strengths and strategy. He recognised that the enemy had a number of advantages. They were fighting on terrain which they knew well. They were prepared for war and certain of their cause. The Boers also possessed a number of tactical advantages over the British troops. As men who shot game for food, they were excellent marksmen. They were very frugal, and could live for days on meagre rations. These factors, along with their adequate horsemanship, made them amazingly mobile. While Haig scorned the Dutch Afrikaner as an inferior being, he had complete respect for his fighting abilities. He therefore advised a cautious policy for the first few months of the hostilities. The few troops available would be used on a 'passive

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 11 October 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 18 October 1899.



defence' aimed to 'have as many horses . . . fit and in hard condition, when the moment for the general advance arrives.'<sup>1</sup> This offensive, he argued, had to await the arrival and proper training of British reinforcements. In view of Haig's usual advocacy of boldness, this attitude of caution is highly significant.

The source of this insight lay in a study of the Boer problem carried out by Haig prior to the war. In his 'Notes on the Transvaal', he examined, in characteristic detail, past campaigns in South Africa. From these he culled ideas relevant to the situation at hand. The first action he examined was the Battle of Boomplatz (August 1848), in which Commandant Pretorius was soundly defeated by Sir Henry Smith, then Governor of Cape Colony. 'The Boers fought well', wrote Haig,

But against them was a general of great experience having the capacity of infusing his spirit of energy into the men he commanded.<sup>2</sup>

This was a point central to Haig's military philosophy: the able leader could inspire his men to do as he wished. The same argument had been used in letters from the Sudan. Able leadership was missing in the second encounter Haig studied, the 1880-1881 Boer War. The Commander, General Sir George Colley, was 'very clever', but 'he lacked experience'. He failed because he could not morally inspire his men. His inadequacies were brought home at Majuba Hill:

. . . why did men bolt from Majuba? There had been two defeats under the same General. How can officers or men have confidence<sup>3</sup> in a man who has twice in succession been badly defeated?

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<sup>1</sup>Outline of memorandum to General Forrester-Walker. Contained in 1899 Diary, following entry for 13 October.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Notes on the Transvaal', n.d., (unpublished). Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 38(i).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

As if supporting a heresy, Haig reluctantly admitted that 'even an English force becomes demoralised after a defeat.'

Colley's failure was not, Haig argued, solely a result of poor leadership. He cited other causes, including a lack of preparation and a disdain for the enemy:

Both the civil and military authorities began by despising the enemy and remained in absolute ignorance of the Enemy against whom a campaign would be prosecuted. No one took the trouble to consider the conditions of the problem.

Haig was determined not to make the same mistake. He examined the composition of Colley's force and concluded that it was inadequate for the task faced. Its main deficiency was the lack of adequate cavalry. The Boers were 'mounted men able to shoot'. To defeat them an army had to be equally mobile.

The third encounter which Haig examined also demonstrated the necessity of a large force of highly mobile cavalry. In the Jameson Raid (1895), failure resulted because the Boers 'kept prolonging their line'. They could do this because they were so mobile. 'They cannot readily be outflanked', yet this was in fact the best way to beat them. Haig again borrowed from history for a solution to this dilemma:

It is a question whether we should not follow Moltke's plan at Konigsgratz [sic] --Crown Prince coming up on Austrian's right and widely separated from Prince Frederick Charles--or as Blucher came up at Waterloo--or as Napoleon used Regulars to turn the Allies' right flank at Baritzen --20th-21st May 1813. No doubt it is dangerous to divide one's force but it must be risked. Otherwise our tactics will merely drive the Boers back from position to position and a series of rearguard actions will result. When we meet them our plans must be such as to insure the annihilation of their field force.<sup>1</sup>

While the above was written in response to the Boer threat, it was a general, not a specific remedy. Holding and compressing the

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations on this page are from 'Notes on the Transvaal'.



enemy front while manoeuvring for the flank was at the heart of Haig's strategical thinking. It was a basic military principle which had stood the test of time. With slight modification, it was relevant to the Boer problem. Haig found security, as usual, in the refuge of historical evidence.

In his 'Notes on the Transvaal', Haig included a breakdown of what he foresaw as the responsibilities of the various British arms. The Boers, he argued, were a relatively primitive people who lacked military organisation and sophistication. They could not, therefore, be expected to field a force of more than 10,000 men at any one place or time. To counter this threat, it was only necessary to maintain infantry superiority. Haig emphasised that an overwhelming infantry predominance would be counterproductive in that it would cause logistical difficulties and reduce mobility. The cavalry would be the main offensive weapon. He reiterated that this arm had to be larger than usual. Artillery, on the other hand, would be almost useless. 'A Boer enemy is not a suitable objective for artillery', Haig claimed. This was because 'he fights as an individual who looks after himself with the greatest care'. In other words, he did not expect to find large concentrations of men, suitable for artillery bombardments. For this reason, the artillery only had to be large enough to maintain mastery over the enemy guns. Any larger, and the precious mobility would be impaired.

Haig concluded his study with a number of ironically relevant points. He stressed the importance of the first strike. The British had to begin with boldness.<sup>1</sup> 'An ignorant army like the Boers will

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<sup>1</sup>This is not a contradiction of his earlier-mentioned advice to General Forrester-Walker, which called for a passive defence. The 'Notes on the Transvaal' was written prior to Haig finding out the small size of the force available. All quotations on this page are from the 'Notes on the Transvaal'.

be impressed by the vigour of the first blow struck.' Likewise, the enemy could not be allowed early successes. Secondly, because this was to be a mobile war, the duties of engineers would be limited to road building and some demolition. Haig did not expect sieges or counter-attacks, so fortification work would be minimal. Finally, he summarised the 'Objective':

The Boer Army: Defeat that and the country is at our mercy. How is that to be got hold of? Aim at some strategic point, which the Army is sure to cover.

The strategic point is PRETORIA.<sup>1</sup>

The inaccuracies of the above predictions are obvious. The Boers fielded a larger force than Haig anticipated. There were sieges at Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith. The Boer Army did not defend Pretoria. The capture of the city did not end the war, but rather ushered in a long, demoralising guerilla campaign. Yet if Haig's clearly stated requirements--a large cavalry force, wise leadership, a bold first strike, etc.--had been satisfied at the outset, the campaign probably would have developed as he predicted. When these requirements were not satisfied, the war assumed a shape for which neither he nor anyone else was prepared.

Haig's first action was exactly as he anticipated. After their declaration of war, the Boers moved into Natal in a three-pronged attack. The southernmost advance, led by General Koch, swept through the Biggarsberg Hills and siezed Elandslaagte on 19 October. Further north, a British force of 4,000 men fought an inconclusive battle at Dundee. On the 20th, these troops retired south towards Ladysmith. In order to ensure a safe British retreat, Koch's force had to be cleared away. General George White commanded the garrison at Ladysmith. He gave responsibility for clearing Elandslaagte to French.

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations on this page are taken from 'Notes on the Transvaal'.



French scouted the position with his cavalry, then called for reinforcements. Half a battalion of the 1st Manchesters, seven companies of the Devonshire Regiment and five of the Gordon Highlanders were supplied to him. He also received two field batteries, squadrons of the 5th Lancers and 5th Dragoon Guards, and local volunteers under the banner of the Imperial Light Horse. French had, in all, 3,000 troops. The Boers had 1,000, mounted and armed in the usual mannner.<sup>1</sup>

The battle adhered so completely to Haig's pre-war plan that it is safe to assume that French relied heavily on his Chief Staff Officer's advice. The infantry was ably led by Colonel Ian Hamilton,<sup>2</sup> who had fought at Majuba. Hamilton and French fitted perfectly into the role of Haig's 'able leaders'. At 3:00 P.M. on 21 October, Hamilton pushed the Devonshires forward in a frontal attack on the Boer position. The men came under heavy fire, but were able, as Haig predicted, to keep the enemy front concentrated. This enabled the flank to be turned by the Manchesters and Gordons. The attack faltered once during the afternoon, but cries of 'Remember Majuba' restored order and courage. It soon became clear that the battle would evolve into hand-to-hand fighting. The Boers, terrified of the bayonet, chose to run rather than face this prospect. When they ran, French released the cavalry. The first charge through the Boers caused utter confusion. The cavalry then turned and charged back through the disordered ranks, completing what Haig properly

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<sup>1</sup>Details of battles and other general information are taken from John Selby, The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage, (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1969) and Edgar Holt, The Boer War, (London: Putnam, 1958).

<sup>1</sup>Later General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the Gallipoli invasion during the Great War.

called an 'annihilation'.

Haig was delighted with the success of the battle, as evidenced by the 26 October letter to his sister:

We were very lucky to have the fight at Elands Laagte. General French in command and self Chief Staff Officer. The Boers fought to the end with extraordinary courage. This is accounted for by the fact that the commands . . . were entirely composed of high class Boers, who had more or less organised the present revolt and so must sink or swim by the result of the campaign.

The Imperial Light Horse fought well and carried on the Gordons with them when the latter were a bit faint-hearted.

. . . The Boers say they never thought the British could have taken their position.<sup>1</sup>

Haig spent the next day questioning prisoners. He was surprised to find 'Boers, Germans, Hollanders, American-Irish, British naturalised Boers, etc.' among Koch's force. Equally surprising for him was the Boer reaction to the cavalry charge. 'They are wild at the way the fugitives were killed with the lance! They say it is butchery, not war.'<sup>2</sup> After the battle the Boers vowed that in future they would shoot captured Lancers. Selby has commented on this issue:

According to their rules they should be able to lie down and fire at an enemy to within twenty yards and then demand and receive individual quarter. Such conditions precluded cavalry and bayonet charges; yet almost only in the use of cold steel were the British superior to the Boers. It is therefore greatly to the credit of the British that they yielded this advantage and fought the war generally in the Boer way.<sup>3</sup>

Selby in fact exaggerated the British sense of fair play. What Elandslaagte demonstrated was the British willingness to charge and to exploit the advantage of the arme blanche. In subsequent

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 October 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Selby, The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage, p. 65.



encounters, this willingness, by itself, had the desired effect.

In other words, whenever the British cavalry showed a bold front and readied for the charge, the Boers usually retired rather than face a repeat of Elands-laagte.

Elands-laagte was followed by a similar success at Rietfontein which ensured the safe retreat of the British force. On 26 October this force entered Ladysmith. Haig recorded that the retreat had been 'quite unmolested, this no doubt due to the moral effect of the victory at Elands-laagte.'<sup>1</sup> Yet the fact remained that a large concentration of British soldiers was now being invested in Ladysmith. As October ended, the circle around the town tightened. On 30 October--'Mournful Monday'--White tried to break the Boer hold by an attack north of the city. His effort lacked the energy and determination displayed by French on the 21st. Each separate commander was given far too much independence, which made the attack totally uncoordinated. White, far away from the action, had no clear idea how the battle progressed. For instance, Haig noted that an order for the cavalry to retire--prompted by the defeat of an infantry detachment on its left--was given while his men were actually forcing the Boers to retire. 'The position held by the Cavalry was a strong one and might have been held against large odds!'<sup>2</sup> It might have. But with a weak commander and a dispirited force on both sides of them, the cavalry's effect was neutralised. Retirement was the best policy, and probably kept White's blunders from turning

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Diary of the Operations of the Cavalry in Natal, October 20th to November 2nd 1899', Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 33. The entry is for 26 October. This diary is the official staff diary and is explained in more detail on page 197. Hereafter cited as 'Cavalry Diary'.

<sup>2</sup>'Cavalry Diary', 30 October 1899.

into a disaster.

Mournful Monday was followed by an equally mournful Tuesday. A small British force under Major John Adye was cleverly out-manoevred north of Ladysmith by a Boer detachment led by Christian De Wet. Over 800 prisoners were taken, Adye among them. Haig felt that the loss was inexcusable. It demonstrated the indispensability of well-trained cavalry:

It should be noticed that this detachment moved without any Cavalry at all. As well let a blind man out without a dog, as Infantry without some horsemen to attend and reconnoitre for it!<sup>1</sup>

Adye's defeat virtually closed the circle around Ladysmith. Haig began to ponder the possibility of a long, demoralising siege--hardly a situation suited to an offensive-minded cavalryman.

The siege of Ladysmith lasted until 28 February 1900. But neither Haig nor French--to the obvious advantage of their respective careers--had to endure it. At 11:00 A.M. on 2 November, White received the following telegram from Buller in Cape Town:

French should take command of the Cavalry Division on the way from Home, and it is my wish particularly that he and Haig should come here if you can spare them possibly.<sup>2</sup>

Haig, French, two A.D.C.s, seven servants and nine horses left Ladysmith two hours later. It was the last train to leave the town for four months.<sup>3</sup> 'I was sorry to leave them all in Ladysmith but we could not help it as we were ordered away',<sup>4</sup> Haig explained. Besides, he claimed, the risk of leaving was far greater than the

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 31 October 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Buller to White, telegram, 1 November 1899. A copy is in the Haig Diary, following the entry for 2 November 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Actually, Haig's train was followed by an armoured train which was technically the last train to leave Ladysmith.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 3 November 1899.



risk of staying:

The train which started at 10:00 a.m. had been fired on, and the railway authorities doubted our getting through.

About half an hour after leaving the train came under heavy fire from both sides of the railway. We heard shells bursting and bullets hit the carriage.

We all lay down on the seat and floor! Not a very dignified position for the Cavalry Division Staff to assume--<sup>1</sup>but discretion is sometimes the better part of valour!

A 2½ inch shell passed through one of the vans, causing damage to Haig's 'nice mule trunks'. 'I did not mind', he wrote, 'for if this shell had hit a wheel or the engine boiler, we would certainly have been now on our way to Pretoria instead of Durban!'<sup>2</sup>

The rest of the journey to Cape Town, via Durban, was uneventful. Haig saw Buller on 8 November. He and French were informed that the Army Corps despatched from Britain had not yet arrived. While waiting for the troops whom he was to train, Haig again took up his pen. He recorded his reflections on two weeks of fighting Boers. This 'Notes on Operations: 20 October to 2 November' was given to Buller. The paper outlined the inadequacies of the British effort and suggested uses for the reinforcements. The paper is significant because it demonstrates how Haig's attitude had changed since his pre-war study. The war was more complicated than he had anticipated. Though he had earlier warned against underestimating the Boers, he himself had been guilty of this fault. Haig realised that victory required a more determined and concentrated effort on the part of the British. One aspect which he cited was the need for more efficient and accurate intelligence. He recognised that poor intelligence had, by reporting a 'phantom force' at Elandslaagte,

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 2 November 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 3 November 1899.

'deprived the Army of the fruits of their victory.'<sup>1</sup> He played close attention to this subject for the duration of the war.

Haig included a series of 'Tactical Notes' in the report he gave to Buller. In these, he revised his opinions on the roles of the various arms. The Artillery was given even less scope than before. 'The effect of the Artillery is more moral than physical', he claimed. 'The teaching of the peace manoeuvres and text books must be modified.' His interrogation of prisoners after Elands-laagte revealed that the 'shells bursting over their positions . . . killed no one!'<sup>2</sup> This was not a fair judgement upon the artillery's effect. It is true that few, if any, Boers were killed by artillery fire at Elands-laagte. But early in the battle the British seven pounders did destroy the outbuildings of the station, a defensive stronghold which would have been difficult to secure by any other means.<sup>3</sup> It is also significant to note that while Haig argued that shrapnel was ineffective against entrenched Boers, he did not suggest the use of high-explosive shells. Rather, he favoured a further reduction of the arm as a whole, in the interests of greater mobility.

Haig favoured a similar proportionate reduction of the infantry. On the defensive, he argued, infantry were valuable. But he was certain that the British would not be on the defensive for much longer. On the offensive,

. . . the value of the Infantry . . . is small, owing to the superior mobility of the Boers. Sufficient only is required for the assault of a position which the Boers hold with guns as a pivot on which they can manoeuvre. The remainder

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Notes on Operations: 20 October to 2 November', Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 38(c).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See Selby, The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage, p. 59, for a discussion of this point.



of the attacking force (say the half) must be mounted troops to oppose the Boer turning movements.<sup>1</sup>

Haig also reiterated a point made during the Sudan campaign, namely that the increased firepower of infantry demanded a looser formation. This was a point which officers in the arm had been slow to grasp. Haig argued that many lives were lost because the British attacks had been too highly concentrated. He admitted that Hamilton at Elands-laagte had shown improvement, but a 'still looser formation, and deeper, seems best against modern rifle fire.'<sup>2</sup>

As expected, Haig repeated his demand for more cavalry, this time with even greater urgency. The arm's offensive capacity had, he felt, greatly increased. Cavalry armed with carbines could fight dismounted, while retaining their mobility. More important to Haig was the fact that the charge had recovered its respectability after the disasters in the Sudan. While the charge at Elands-laagte was not of the classical knee-to-knee type, this did not seem to matter to Haig. Open spaces and a highly mobile enemy had, he rightly recognised, given unusual offensive scope to the cavalry. The cavalry, and particularly the use of cold steel, was, as Selby maintains, distinct British advantages. The war thus played into the hands of the cavalry romantics. Haig misinterpreted this fleeting renaissance as a harbinger of twentieth century tactics:

That Cavalry, armed as it is now, with a good firearm is a new element in tactics was abundantly proved by these operations.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, he advocated a number of changes designed to

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, 'Notes on Operations, 20 October to 2 November'.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Haig's praise of the rifle here should not be taken as a contradiction of the attitude he assumed in the post-war cavalry argument, to be discussed in the next chapter. He always favoured arming cavalry with rifles, but was against the abolition of the lance.

make the arm even more mobile. He openly admitted that many of these measures were borrowed from the Boers. 'Cavalry', he urged, 'should be organised to go for three days without any wheeled transport.' Rations carried on the horse should be increased; unnecessary equipment discarded. One item in the latter category was the dragoon lance which 'hamper them in their duties'.<sup>1</sup>

In his 'Notes on Operations', Haig emphasised the need for extensive peacetime dismounted training. On the surface, this appears to be an endorsement of the mounted infantry, which he had earlier scorned. Yet Haig remained an ardent opponent of M.I.:

The one thing required here is 'Cavalry'! I think the country ought to be alive now to the fact (which we have always pointed out) that we don't keep enough of the arm in peacetime! This mounted infantry craze is now I trust exploded. So far they have proved useless and are not likely to be of use until they learn to ride! You had better not give these views to Sir Evelyn, for both he and Lord Wolseley are the parents of the Mounted Infantry.<sup>2</sup>

Mounted infantry, Haig believed, were superfluous. There was nothing the M.I. could accomplish which well-trained cavalry could not do better. At the same time, cavalry had the ability to fight mounted--and the moral effect attendant therein. M.I. were not trained to fight mounted. Haig's attitude was best expressed in his praise for the Imperial Light Horse after the Battle of Elandslaagte: 'When for a moment there was a check in the advance, . . . the I.L.H. first went forward again.' This was because the 'I.L.H. are cavalry, not M.I. being organised as cavalry.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig spent most of November in Cape Town, where he organised

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, 'Notes on Operations: 20 October to 2 November'.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 November 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Haig, 'Notes on Operations: 20 October to 2 November'.



a cavalry camp on the outskirts of the city. The slow arrival of British reinforcements increased his frustration and anger with the government at home. The politicians, he felt, were too eager to rely on the locally raised M.I. units:

This class of M.I.s is useless. It would be better to call up all reservists of the Cavalry and send them out here to ride horses of the country. In any case the Sec'y of State for War must be strongly condemned for not sending out ample Cavalry in fast ships to this country.<sup>1</sup>

Though he was impatient for the beginning of a bold offensive, he realised that the poor quality of the troops required a continuing policy of caution. The disasters of Black Week--Colenso, Magersfontein and Stormberg--demonstrated how some had not appreciated this fact:

If we only had sufficient Cavalry with fit horses, we could do anything we liked with these Boers. It is because self-advertising men like Gatacre push on without realising the value of well-formed Cavalry, that we have been checked at so many points. This war will do the country a lot of good: already many, who held reputations for skill in savage warfare, have been found useless.<sup>2</sup>

The criticisms were justified and the prediction turned out to be a fairly accurate one.

In stark contrast to the disasters of Black Week and Buller's ineffective efforts to relieve Ladysmith were French's operations around Colesberg. Here, a Boer force of 5,000 men was poised ready to invade Cape Colony. French's containment of the threat was in the finest traditions of British improvisation. By keeping constantly on the move, and by making impressive use of surprise and

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 23 October 1899. The lack of well-trained troops was a source of constant worry for Haig. For instance, on 1 December he commented in his diary: 'A 2nd Lieutenant, a photographer, sent to join us to photograph positions! We get everything except fighting men!'

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 12 December 1899.

deception, French neutralised the Boer force until February; when the offensive begun by Roberts changed the character of the war.<sup>1</sup>

Haig described the operations to Henrietta on 23 December:

At present we only carry out small reconnaissance round the enemy's flanks and do our best to keep quiet so as to rest our horses as much as possible. . . . Our usual day's work is to go out about 4:30 a.m. to one or other flanks of the Boer position and have a look to see if they are going on all right! For this we take out usually some dozen or more men as escort to the General and to look out when we halt. . . . It is very satisfactory to have kept so many (about 5,000) of the Enemy to their positions near Colesberg. We have, all told, about 2,000 men here, and half that number at Nauwpoort . . .<sup>2</sup>

By containing the Boers at Colesberg, the British were granted the time to train the newly-arrived reinforcements. For French and Haig, the success increased their prestige still further. After five months of war, they had shared in most of the British successes, and avoided all the disasters.

While involved in the Colesberg operations, Haig had additional responsibilities:

I'm really very busy: so many things to arrange. We have the line of communication from Port Elizabeth to control as well as this place and the enemy (some 5,000) to retain at Colesberg. The civilians get excited and we are flooded with telegrams from magistrates who think the sea-side is the only safe place. . . .<sup>3</sup> We administer Martial Law of course. Rough and Ready.

The Boer Army was a citizen force raised among Dutch farmers throughout South Africa. This gave rise to unwonted experiences for a regular soldier like Haig. He was not used to dealing with the problems of a population divided by pro-Boer and pro-British sentiments. After fifteen years in the Army, he had become isolated from the emotions of men for whom military action was a new and

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<sup>1</sup>French left the Colesberg area in January, but his policies continued unchanged in his absence.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 23 December 1899.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 12 December 1899.



frightening experience. This isolation bred intolerance. At one point, for instance, he felt 'ashamed of the men at the way they showed their fear.'<sup>1</sup>

In mid-January, French was called away from Colesberg, in order to take command of the now battle-ready Cavalry Division. The long awaited offensive under Roberts and Kitchener was due to begin. At this time, Roberts ordered a change in French's staff. Colonel the Earl of Errol, who had only recently arrived from Britain, was to replace Haig as French's A.A.G. Haig was to become D.A.A.G. French protested in a telegram to Roberts:

I point out that the appointment of A.A.G. to Cavalry Division was promised by Sir Redvers Buller to Major Haig with the local rank of Lieutenant Colonel. I earnestly beg that Field Marshall will be pleased to confirm this. Major Haig has performed duty of C.S.O. to division since landing in Natal. He has acted in this capacity under my command in three general engagements and many smaller fights. His services have been invaluable.<sup>2</sup>

Kitchener, Roberts' Chief of Staff, replied in a sympathetic but firm tone:

The F.M. C. in C. fully realises the very excellent services rendered by Major Haig and much regrets not being able to meet your views as regards his taking position of A.A.G. of the Cavalry Division that position however the Field Marshall thinks must be fitted by the appointment of a senior officer and he feels sure you will find in Colonel the Earl of Errol an efficient officer.<sup>3</sup>

When seniority is used as the reason to supersede an officer, it is often to mask less legitimate reasons. This was probably the case here. Roberts and Haig had managed to avoid each other for most of their careers. Nevertheless, it would have been clear to

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 8 November 1899.

<sup>2</sup>French to Roberts, telegram, 18 January 1900, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(c). D.A.A.G. is Deputy Assistant Adjutant General.

<sup>3</sup>Kitchener to French, telegram, 19 January 1900, (same source).

both that they had little upon which to agree. There was no justifiable reason to replace Haig, a soldier who had up until that time performed exceptionally well. It is quite obvious that on this occasion Roberts eagerly grabbed the opportunity to use seniority to demote an officer for whom he had little fondness.

French was not willing to let the matter lie. He realised that he owed much of his success to Haig. He therefore sent an A.D.C., Captain J. F. Laycock, to try and persuade Roberts to change his mind. Laycock pointed out to Roberts that Haig knew the country, Boer tactics, and the men of the Cavalry Division better than Errol. Roberts did not budge. 'On the third time of making my appeal', Laycock recalled, 'I was so seriously shut up that it was impossible to carry the matter further.' When Laycock returned to the Division, Errol assumed his position, and Haig his. Laycock related how Haig, though 'very annoyed' was 'all the time maintaining a most correct attitude.'<sup>1</sup> This attitude is revealed in a letter written to Henrietta from Cape Town:

Everyone I meet down here consoles with me on being superseded by Erroll[sic] etc. . . . As a matter of fact I think less about this appointment than my friends. But of course it is gratifying to think that one's work is appreciated in the Division.<sup>2</sup>

The attitude was probably genuine. Haig felt at ease because the change was really only a formality.<sup>3</sup> He remained in the role of French's trusted adviser, with Errol probably feeling like a spare

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<sup>1</sup>J. F. Laycock to the Countess Haig, 13 February 1930, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 February 1900.

<sup>3</sup>The best evidence that Haig's role did not change can be found in the Cavalry Division Staff Diaries (Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, Nos. 34-36), in which Haig recorded each day's activities and the duties he performed. There is no noticeable change in either after Errol joined the staff.



part.

In his letter to the Countess Haig, Laycock described the quality which made Haig an exceptional staff officer:

The thing that struck me most was his extraordinary ability to express in concise form, capable of being copied into a notebook on the field, important orders for the movement and disposition of troops.<sup>1</sup>

Laycock's opinion is supported by the four staff diaries which Haig compiled during the war. These cover the period from October 1899 to October 1900, and contain concise accounts of each day's operations, supplemented by relevant maps, telegrams and orders. The staff diaries are distinct from Haig's personal diaries for the period, in which he recorded his own opinions. The staff diaries are mostly too technical for this study, consisting mainly of highly detailed data which, though central to the situation confronting Haig and French, provide little retrospective insight. They nevertheless reveal Haig's remarkable administrative abilities. Few aspects of the command escaped his notice and mention. After the war the diaries were used by the Staff College as examples of excellent staff work. The Commandant of the College, H. G. Miles, upon receiving them, wrote that 'they will be of immense practical use for they are indeed an example to be worked up to.' He further admitted that he had seen 'no records of the war which equalled them in completeness or in interest.'<sup>2</sup>

Soon after Errol replaced Haig, the British offensive began. While the first strike came later than Haig had anticipated and hoped,

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<sup>1</sup>J. F. Laycock to the Countess Haig, 13 March 1930.

<sup>2</sup>H. G. Miles to Douglas Haig, 4 January 1903. Found in the 'Cavalry Division: Diary and Orders Vol. I' (8 November 1899 to 13 March 1900), Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 34. Hereafter cited as 'Cavalry Division Diary'.

it was delivered with the boldness he desired. By containing the Boer force at Colesberg, the British were able to move northward virtually unimpeded as far as Modder River Station. Here Roberts concentrated 30,000 men of all arms. He aimed his first strike at the besieged town of Kimberley. Here, 50,000 inhabitants had been held captive since early October. One of the captives was Cecil Rhodes, whose De Beers group had valuable diamond mines and workshops in the area. Kimberley was surrounded by 4,000 Boers, led by General Piet Cronje. The British garrison was led by Colonel R. G. Kekewich, a capable officer. Kekewich and Rhodes had fallen out early in the siege, making real control of the town uncertain. Kekewich controlled the military, but Rhodes--as the principle employer--had the citizenry in his pocket. As the siege dragged on, Rhodes became increasingly impatient and insufferable. On 10 February he demanded that Kekewich inform him how and when the town would be relieved. He threatened to call a public meeting if his demands were not met. Kekewich perhaps correctly interpreted this as a threat of mutiny and possible surrender. He telegraphed his fears to Roberts, who instructed the Colonel to arrest Rhodes if necessary. Rhodes subsequently calmed down, and claimed that he had not considered surrender. The situation nevertheless remained critical.

Rhodes' intransigence probably forced Roberts' hand. He had to act quickly in order to save Kimberley. This meant that a prolonged battle with Cronje was impracticable. Cronje expected a frontal attack or, failing that, an approach from the west. Roberts encouraged these expectations through ingenious deception carried out by his Intelligence Officer, Colonel G. F. R. Henderson. Roberts' real plan was revealed only to his closest advisors. He



boldly intended to abandon his rail link, march east and then north through the Orange Free State, and then approach Cronje from the east--the enemy's left. The plan was risky, but Cronje was weakest here. If the British could complete the long march without disaster, the final assault promised to be relatively easy. Relief of the city would come quickly and without heavy losses. By attacking in this direction, Roberts also hoped to cut Cronje off from retreat into the Orange Free State or north into the Transvaal.

Roberts made it clear that since speed was essential, the burden would weigh heaviest on the cavalry. As Haig recorded on 10 February:

11:00 a.m.: Lord Kitchener arrived at Cavalry Camp to see French. He explained the difficulty of the situation, not merely in South Africa, but the risks to the Empire generally if Kimberley was not relieved. All hope of relieving Lady-smith directly had gone. 'The Cavalry must relieve Kimberley at all costs', he said.<sup>1</sup>

Roberts pressed the point further when he personally addressed a meeting of cavalry officers later on the same day:

. . . I want to tell you that I am going to give you some very hard work to do, but at the same time you are going to get the greatest chance Cavalry has ever had. I am certain you will do well. I have received news from Kimberley from which I know that it is very important the town should be relieved in the course of the next five days, and you and your men are to do this. The enemy have placed a big gun in position and are shelling the town, killing women and children, in consequence of which the civilian population are urging Colonel Kekewich to capitulate. You will remember what you are going to do all your lives, and when you have grown to be old men you will tell the story of the relief of Kimberley. . . . The Enemy are afraid of the British Cavalry, and I hope when you get them into the open you will make an example of them.<sup>2</sup>

With the cavalry in the van, the advance began the following day.

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<sup>1</sup>Cavalry Division Diary, 10 February 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Selby, The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage, p. 168.

In the eastward movement, important victories were gained at Belmont and Graspan. A Boer force under De Wet threatened the British advance at De Kiel's Drift, but was no more than a nuisance.

At De Kiel's Drift the advanced shifted northward and increased in speed. Horses collapsed from exhaustion. At each stop a large number of animals had to be destroyed. At 5:00 P.M. on 14 February, French siezed Klip Drift, twenty miles from Kimberley. The hardest part of the task was complete. Cronje had been successfully outmanoeuvred. All that lay between French and Kimberley was a small Boer force. It was, however, in a defensive stronghold on two converging ridges just north of Klip Drift. The position had to be taken before the final advance could proceed. During the night the infantry caught up and freed the cavalry for the next day's assault. French intended to use three brigades of cavalry--led by Colonels Porter, Gordon and Broadwood--for the attack on the Boer position.

The next morning the advance began. The last thing the Boers expected was for French to drive his men between the two ridges. But, in line with Roberts' habit of misleading the enemy, this is exactly what French did. Captain C. Boyle, a galloper on the cavalry staff, wrote a stirring description of the action for The Times:

The moment was one I can never forget. There was a pause during which we all looked at each other. I watched the General, wondering what he would do. It would have been simple enough to manoeuvre and fight, had we nothing to do but fight the enemy in front of us. But we had to get to Kimberley that night or fail. Suddenly the General decided to make a dash . . . He sent for the brigadiers, ordered three batteries up to play on the enemy, and the 16th and 9th Lancers to make a dash at once. . . . a terrific fire opened up on them and as they disappeared into the dust one wondered how they could have fared. As the dust cleared the General decided to ride for it himself . . . We sat down and rode



all we knew, expecting the same fire on us. To our great surprise not a shot was fired. The moral effect of the cavalry charge across their front and the fear that we should work around their flank had been too much for the Boers and they had bolted. Still more remarkable was the little loss they had inflicted--a few dead horses and some wounded, was all I saw on the plain. The whole thing was a marvellous example of what a cavalry dash can do.<sup>1</sup>

French was now in position to attack the rear of Cronje's laager.

But instead of wheeling to the west, he ordered Broadwood on to Kimberley. French and Haig followed at a safe distance, and were greeted by the mayor as they entered the town. They dined that night with Rhodes, and celebrated their success with 'plenty of champagne'.<sup>2</sup>

The relief of Kimberley was the high point of the war and certainly the most impressive spectacle of Haig's career. It was the last great charge of British cavalry. It deserves greater acclaim than the heroics at Balaclava, because not only was it dramatic, it was also successful. Success was, in addition, achieved at low cost. Only seven men were killed. But the charge should not have succeeded. In 1900, a cavalry force, no matter how morally inspired, should not have been able to overrun a well-fortified position. It was not the charge, but rather the four day march which preceded it, which saved Kimberley. Roberts found and manoeuvred to the Boer weak spot.<sup>3</sup> French then pierced it. While French was undoubtedly surprised by the ease of the final assault, he would not have ordered it had he not been certain of success. French was not a rash glory-seeker like Colonel Martin. Unlike Martin, he had thoroughly scouted the obstacle. This is not to discount the spectacular nature of the

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<sup>1</sup>The Times, 6 April 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 22 February 1900.

<sup>3</sup>The Boers had 900 men and two guns on the two ridges. Attacking them was a British force of 8,000 cavalry, 6,000 mounted infantry and 56 guns. See Spiers, 'The British Cavalry, 1902-1914', pp. 74-75.

attack, nor the bravery of those involved. But it must be emphasised that the relief of Kimberley was more a testimony to wise preparation than to moral inspiration.

These distinctions and qualifications escaped the men involved. To them, the charge was all that mattered. Roberts had told them that they would remember what they were going to do all their lives. He could not have been more correct. As old men, they continued to tell the story of the relief of Kimberley. Every year on the 15th of February, until long after the Great War, these men gathered in London to recall their day of glory. It had been, as Roberts predicted, 'the greatest chance cavalry had ever had' because it had been so certain of glory and, in the end, so free of danger. The effect upon Haig was predictable. His self-assurance and confidence in the cavalry swelled to yet greater proportions. To Lonsdale Hale, he wrote:

You will I think agree with me that the Cavalry--the despised Cavalry I should say--has saved the Empire.<sup>1</sup>

He urged Hale to make this point clear to those at home:

I trust to you to insist on a large and efficient Cavalry being kept up in time of peace. At least two Divisions complete . . .

You must rub this fact into those wretched individuals who pretend to rule the Empire! And in any case before they decide on reorganising the Army let them get the experience of those who have seen the effect of modern firearms and have learnt to realise that the old story is true, viz. that 'moral' is everything, and not merely guns but men who can use them is what is wanted to defend the Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The post-Boer War cavalry reaction led by French and Haig which, as will be discussed in the next three chapters, blurred modern

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig to Colonel Lonsdale Hale, 2 March 1900, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e). Hale was a sometime lecturer at the Staff College and an active supporter of the cavalry.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



developments in military science, was born at Kimberley. .

The relief of Kimberley isolated Cronje. His only escape route lay between Roberts' advance troops at Klip Drift and French's cavalry in Kimberley. Lord Methuen had been ordered to stay at Modder River Station to guard against such an eventuality. Through lack of initiative, however, he let Cronje escape. This forced Roberts to again call upon the cavalry to save the situation. French scraped together a brigade from among his beleagured force. He raced these men to Koedoesrand Drift, which lay directly in Cronje's path. This slowed the Boer retreat long enough for the infantry and artillery to arrive. The result was the Battle of Paardeburg, in which Cronje and his 4,000 men were forced to surrender to a superior British force. The ending was impressive, but the manner in which it was achieved was not. Just before the final assault on the 19th, Roberts took ill. He handed control to Kitchener, to the consternation of divisional commanders senior to him in rank. The battle was marred by Kitchener's usual indecision and the jealous, childish behaviour of Generals Colville and Kelly-Kenney, who refused to pull their weight.

Haig reflected on the shameful performance at Paardeburg in his letter to Hale. He rightly claimed that Cronje would have escaped had it not been for the cavalry. During the actual battle, the arm again made a significant contribution:

. . . we were called upon to send 'a Brigade' to support the infantry on the left flank!! But we scarcely had a Brigade to send! However we sent all we could and Broadwood's account of how Kitchener welcomed him as a deliverer is instructive. He (K) likened our infantry to the Egyptian fellaheen, ready to allow themselves to be killed without an effort, ignorant and unthinking.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Hale, 2 March 1900.

Kitchener was referring to the enlisted men and N.C.O.s. Haig took the criticism further. 'Personally I think there is something far wrong with our infantry from the Generals downward.' He did not exclude the Commander-in-Chief. He railed at the 'state of muddle and confusion existing at Roberts' headquarters'. Roberts' staff was composed of 'old Simla warriors, grey with the experience of years of office work' along with a collection of 'lordlings and social lights'. There was also 'Kitchener's youths from Egypt'-- officers with whom the Sirdar had perhaps more than a strictly professional relationship. 'I was at Head Quarters 7 days', wrote Haig, 'and if I described all that I saw going on, you would say I was a "croker"'.<sup>1</sup>

Haig was more specific in his criticism of Roberts after the Battle of Bloemfontein:

The Field Marshall has fairly made a mess of things since we reached Bloemfontein. Instead of organising his Army into three or four parts he tries to command every little detachment and to command each little part himself by telegram! . . . Roberts is now at Brandfort but Lady R is here and as far as I can gather runs the show!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Hale, 2 March 1900. It has already been shown how Haig openly criticised his senior commanders in letters to Wood written from the Sudan. He continued this habit in the Boer War. Some of his criticisms, either directly or indirectly, reached the Prince of Wales. The Prince felt that Haig should have been a bit more discreet. Duff Cooper (p. 88-89) deals with this issue and quotes a letter Haig wrote to 'a friend' (probably either Wood or Hale): 'Curiously enough Henrietta writes me . . . of advice which the Prince of Wales was good enough to give to Willie Jameson for my benefit. The same advice was administered to me by Holford after the Soudan Campaign--namely, that I am too fond of criticising my senior officers. My "criticisms" says H.R.H. "may be correct, but it does not do." Now I never criticise people except privately, and what a stupid letter it would be if I did not express an opinion. Besides, I think we would have better Generals in the higher ranks and the country would not have had to pass through such a period of anxiety had not honest criticism, based on sound reasoning, been more general in reference to military affairs during the last twenty years.'

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Haig to Hugo Haig, 5 May 1900, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).



The criticisms were similar to those levelled at Kitchener during the Sudan Campaign. Both Kitchener and Roberts were slow to acknowledge the necessity for a modern administrative staff. For both the staff was a useful haven for their cronies. Both tried to maintain direct control over every aspect of their commands. In the Boer War, the armies were still small enough for a commander of Roberts' ability to be successful without the aid of a staff. Haig's criticisms, though correct in theory, were not entirely fair. When Roberts took over, the character of the British war effort changed almost overnight. Despite his antiquated attitude toward the staff, he must be given credit for placing his army on a victory footing. p

Haig's criticism of Roberts was probably fuelled to some extent by continued ill-feeling over the Errol affair. The matter was resolved in Haig's favour after the Battle of Paardeburg, but not before another confusing round of promotions and appointments. On 22 February, Haig wrote that he had been given command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, with the local rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He confided to his sister that 'it is a great piece of good luck being given command of this Brigade, for of course we have any number of old fossils about--full Colonels etc.' Two paragraphs later, in the same letter, he informed Henrietta that 'since writing above I have been appointed Chief Staff Officer of the Division (that is A.A.G.) Lt. Errol being moved to Roberts' staff . . .'.<sup>1</sup> According to Laycock, the change resulted from a conversation he had with Kitchener. Laycock told Kitchener that as C.S.O. Errol was potentially dangerous and 'definitely harmful'.<sup>2</sup> Kitchener acted immediately. Haig was reinstated in his old position, one

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 22 February 1900.

<sup>2</sup>J. F. Laycock to the Countess Haig, 13 March 1930.

which he felt 'will suit me very well'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the whole affair must have left him with a bitter taste.

After Kimberley and Paardeburg, Buller finally relieved Ladysmith on 28 February. The British momentum was virtually impossible for the Boers to counter. Roberts next aimed for Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. President Kruger of the Transvaal, aware that his country would be Roberts' next objective, urged President Steyn to make a determined resistance at Bloemfontein. Steyn agreed. The defence was organised at Poplar Grove, twenty-five miles south of the city. Here, a twenty-five mile string of kopjes--a remarkable defensive advantage--lay perpendicular to Roberts' line of advance. But Poplar Grove fell almost as easily as Klip Drift. The battle assumed a familiar form: the infantry were poised for a frontal attack while the cavalry slipped around to the flank and rear. On this occasion, the infantry had little to do:

. . . Wednesday, 7th March we marched at 3 a.m. and moved around the left, or Southern flank, of the Boer position which they had been strengthening with entrenchments for some days. We got completely around the enemy and quite surprised them. The Boers left their trenches and some took up new positions to try and check our advance, we lost fairly heavily in turning some Boers out of a farm and off a ridge; but nothing of course compared to what infantry would have suffered had they tried to dislodge the Boers by an attack on the position . . .<sup>2</sup>

The Boers fled from Poplar Grove in disarray. They rallied again at Abrahm's Kraal, but then panicked when the cavalry showed a bold front. Their courage could not be restored for the defence of the capital. Bloemfontein fell, anticlimactically, on 13 March.

Roberts rested his troops for seven weeks in Bloemfontein,

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 22 February 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 16 March 1900.



probably to his own disadvantage. It was here that the infamous epidemic of enteric fever raged out of control. Nearly 15,000 of the 200,000 British soldiers in South Africa contracted the disease. Haig avoided it, probably because of the immunity he developed in India. The seven weeks in Bloemfontein was nevertheless a time of great frustration and anxiety for him. The cavalry had done the majority of the fighting for the past month. They were as a result a dilapidated remnant of the force which left Cape Town. Haig repeatedly complained of the situation in letters to his sister:

So you see we are continually on the move and our horses are quite done up. Whenever there is an alarm, Lord Roberts at once orders out French and the Cavalry. I don't know what we will do for horses.<sup>1</sup>

Not only was the supply of horses inadequate, so too was the supply of men:

The Colonial Corps raised in the Cape Colony are quite useless, so are the recently raised Mounted Infantry. They can't ride and know nothing about their duties as mounted men. Roberts' Horse and Kitchener's Horse are good only for looting and the greater part of them disappear the moment a shot is fired or there is a prospect of a fight. You will then see that the success of the Cavalry Division has been in spite of these ruffians, and notwithstanding short rations.<sup>2</sup>

These complaints were not entirely fair. They are a reflection of Haig's often irrational prejudice against the mounted infantry and irregular troops. These men were not, in all cases, 'ruffians'. They had unfortunately been plunged into a situation for which they were ill-prepared. Blame for this lack of preparation belonged to those in higher quarters, as Haig sometimes acknowledged.

Haig was also angered by Roberts' 'sideshows' around Bloemfontein.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 April 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 16 March 1900.

These, he felt, did not aid the eventual advance on Pretoria, but instead wasted valuable men and material. On one sideshow, a cavalry brigade was sent to Thaba N'Chu to try and stop a Boer force of 6,000 men moving north to the Transvaal:

On hearing of our approach, however, they altered the direction of their march and took a road further to the east and close to Basuto-land--passing by Ladybrand. We did not start soon enough to stop them.<sup>1</sup>

In a subsequent letter, Haig again questioned Roberts' motives:

You will remember I told you of our going to Thaba N'Chu, and we thought it a mistake to engage in a secondary operation in that direction instead of making good our communications and pressing the Enemy at a decisive point --that is northwards.<sup>2</sup>

On this occasion the criticism was justified. The action gained nothing and ended in disaster. Broadwood's brigade, while returning to Bloemfontein, fell into a trap at Sannah's Post. The trap had been set for a smaller British force also in the area, but De Wet, the Boer commander, took full advantage of his extraordinary luck. Broadwood eventually retreated in order, but only after one-third of his 1600 men were forced to surrender. He also lost seven guns and eighty-three loaded wagons. When Broadwood returned, Haig showed his bitterness by sarcastically remarking that 'he has got off very cheaply. One almost thinks Lord Roberts likes losing guns, judging by the way he received B. on his return.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig also disagreed with Roberts' treatment of Free Staters loyal to the Boer cause. The situation wherein a man could be a peaceful farmer one day and a commando the next made Haig uneasy. He reacted by advocating more repressive measures:

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 22 March 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 April 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 April 1900.



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ORIGINAL THESIS

It seems high time we treated these people with greater severity. Up to the present we have made the war too pleasant for the Free Staters, and so they allow it to continue. If we were only to loot and burn a few farms, the inhabitants would wish to get us out of the country soon and at once sue for peace.<sup>1</sup>

On Roberts' leniency he commented:

At Thabanchu many poor creatures brought in their guns and swore an oath not to fight against us again. Then we withdraw our troops and the Transvaalers burn all the farms.

Such conduct merely brings us into contempt, altho' Roberts no doubt expected to gain popularity with the British Public by being generous and merciful to the conquered.<sup>2</sup>

When guerilla warfare arose after the fall of Pretoria, Haig had his chance to be severe. At this stage, however, leniency was probably the best policy. Severity probably would have made the Boers more determined. Haig's advocacy of sterner measures betrays his ignorance of subtleties of this nature.

The 300 mile advance to Pretoria began on 22 April. The British fielded an impressive force. 100,000 men, divided into five groups, advanced northwards, while another 50,000 guarded the rear. Roberts took the central column of 38,000 men which followed the railway. Hamilton, with the mounted infantry, advanced on the right, while Methuen, with a force of all arms, moved on the left. Buller, as usual slowed by over-caution, advanced at a snail's pace through Natal. French, with the cavalry, was at his accustomed place in the van. The advance was uneventful and largely unimpeded. By 4 June, the British were on the outskirts of Pretoria, ready for a prolonged siege. General Botha, in charge of the garrison, decided that the city was impossible to defend. He collected his men and arms and escaped to the east. Roberts raised

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 May 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 April 1900.



the Union Jack above Pretoria on 5 June.

The cavalry led the way over the entire march to Pretoria. As a result, they did most of the fighting. Haig commented on this fact in a letter to Henrietta:

I hear from several sources that the Infantry are quite jealous of the successes of the Cavalry. The poor creatures merely carry their guns without loosing off! In fact they simply wear out their boots to no purpose!! All the same but for the Cavalry . . . many of them would now be below ground. . .<sup>1</sup>

The success of the cavalry gave rise to jealousy on Haig's part also:

You will see in the Diary how the Landvost of Kroonstad came out to surrender the town to French, but we packed him off into the town again to wait for the Field Marshall! The latter meantime having helio'd that no patrols were to enter the town. We came on here with the Cavalry and Roberts marched in at the head of the Infantry! I am afraid he is a silly old man and scarcely fit to be C. in C. of this show.<sup>2</sup>

As commander of the British force, Roberts had every right to enter the town as he pleased.<sup>3</sup> His direction of the campaign had been mostly brilliant. True, the cavalry had borne the brunt of the fighting. But its success had had a blinding effect upon Haig. What he failed to appreciate was that the cavalry was like a bullet, while the rest of the British Army was the gun. The bullet would have been impotent without the gun to fire it.

In his pre-war study, Haig predicted that the capture of Pretoria would spell defeat for the Boers. He did not immediately change this view when he arrived in the town:

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 May 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>In the Great War, Haig had an honour guard which consisted of an entire squadron of the 17th Lancers. The guard was used on ceremonial occasions such as the entering of captured towns. The cavalry in the Great War made a less significant contribution than the infantry in the Boer War.

I fancy that if Buller would only come on, and if an able man was sent to sweep up the N.E. corner of the Free State this war would soon be finished.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, Buller moved north and the cavalry advanced northeast, seizing Machadosdorp. But the war continued. Uncertainty crept into Haig's letters, though he generally remained optimistic about an early conclusion:

It is impossible to say whether the Boers will continue fighting . . . Spring is now coming on and the sun gets warmer daily so that the bushveldt and lower valleys will soon be unbearable and unhealthy. So I expect a good many will try to get back to their farms. I am therefore inclined to believe a report that the war will be practically over by the time you get this letter (beginning of Sept.).<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, the war was over when Haig expected. Botha retreated north into the mountains. Other Boer commands fractured into small groups and scattered. On 13 September Roberts issued a proclamation declaring hostilities ended. He and Buller made preparations to go home. But a new war soon started, one for which the British were as unprepared as they had been a year earlier.

In a letter to his brother Hugo dated 2 August, Haig explained why his prediction of an early end to the conflict had not come true:

I thought at one time that everything would have been settled here to enable me to be back in time to join you all at the Cabrach.

For several reasons my forecasts have not turned out correct! The chief one is because Lord Roberts thinks he can make war without running risks!<sup>3</sup>

He did not mention what the other reasons were. In his view, the

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 June 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 15 August 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas Haig to Hugo Haig, 2 August 1900, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(c).



war--as he had maintained all along--had to be made unbearable for the Boer farmer. Though the continued fighting came as a surprise to him, he was quick to perceive the need for new tactics:

What is wanted now is to form detachments all about the country so that movable columns can sweep the country without having to take waggons with them. One column by itself does no good: the Boers merely move out of the road until it has passed, sending out a few snipers to worry its flanks and rear.

. . . I think that the Cavalry Division must be broken up as a Division, and the regiments spread out with various columns and posts. There is now no enemy in formed bodies to be dealt with but merely a lot of bands of marauders numbering 30 to 200 men each. But, as yet we know nothing of what Roberts' scheme may be!<sup>1</sup>

These policies were soon adopted but they, too, proved unequal to the Boer menace.

The possibility of an end to the war caused Henrietta to focus her attention on her brother's post-war career. She was mainly concerned with two subjects: decorations and promotion. Though the fighting would drag on for another nineteen months, she continually returned to these two topics in her letters to Douglas. The matter of decorations she discussed at length with Evelyn Wood. Henrietta felt that her brother deserved any of a number of different medals. Wood apparently agreed. Haig, however, maintained that the matter did not concern him, and he would rather it did not concern her. 'I hate to think of these self-advertising people like B.P. and family<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, he wrote,

As to Sir E. W.'s questions, it is interesting to note that there is not a single officer on this staff from French down who has a single decoration! As I have often said, decorations and small wars ruined the French Army before 1870: the same causes have done much to render our

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 19 October 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 9 July 1900. 'B.P.' is Baden Powell.

own inefficient. So really I am not at all anxious for rewards which after all mean very little.<sup>1</sup>

Haig maintained a similar attitude throughout his career. He often insisted that he was not interested in rewards or decorations--so often, in fact, that one wonders whether the opposite was actually the case. His true opinion will never be known. The interpretation depends on the judge. Nevertheless, it is possible that Haig was so certain of his ultimate success that he really cared little for the meaningless decorations he collected on the way to the top. Decorations are symbols of past achievements. With regard to his own career, Haig continually looked forward.

Henrietta likewise discussed her brother's promotion with Wood. Her meddling in this area interested Haig a great deal more. His letters reveal that he spent much time deliberating his future. For instance, on 9 July he wrote that

French wants to get me made an A.D.C. because that at once gives one the rank of a full Colonel.

As to commanding a regiment, of course if it is necessary I'll do it, but there is no catch in going to command some regt. which has to be wheeled into line a bit . . .<sup>2</sup>

He returned to the matter a month later:

By the way French had a letter from Evelyn Wood this morning about me, stating briefly that the Cavalry had not done well in this campaign except when under French, and suggesting that the cause was a deficiency in Cavalry leaders. So in his opinion it was to the interests of the service to put me soon in command of a regiment, and he directs him to take what action he (French) thinks fit in the matter. French is replying that I had once been appointed to a Brigade, and that I might now be in command of one were it not to the interests of the service that I should remain in my present billet. My present appointment of Chief Staff Officer of a Cavalry Division of 4 Cavalry Brigades is superior to any regt. appointment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 9 July 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. He was referring to being A.D.C. to the Queen.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 August 1900.



Haig ended this letter by claiming that 'I don't care much what happens to me'.<sup>1</sup> This appears to have been false modesty. Promotion --unlike decoration--meant both power and prestige. The latter may not have interested him. The former definitely did.

In November 1900 the Cavalry Division was broken up, as Haig had advised. French was given command of a force of all arms which was to guard a district centred on Johannesburg. Haig remained his Chief of Staff. He was pleased with the new assignment: 'I suppose Johannesburg is quite the best part of the country to stay in, so we can't complain.'<sup>2</sup> The work was neither difficult nor time-consuming. 'The District is subdivided into smaller commands so that there won't be a great deal of active work to be done by General F. and his staff.'<sup>3</sup> French and Haig had simply to watch for disturbances and, when they occurred, apply the relevant degree of force. This was hardly war, as evidenced by Haig's living arrangements:

This is a grand house on the top of a hill overlooking Johannesburg, two bath rooms with hot and cold water, so that we are living in luxury now. I play polo 3 days a week.<sup>4</sup>

The life was so easy that Haig urged his sister to come and visit him. He promised that he could entertain her in the style to which she was accustomed. He even postulated that the war would be over by the time she arrived. 'At present all is at a standstill waiting for Lord Roberts' daughter to get well and his departure!!', he explained. 'Lord Kitchener will then take up the command and no

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 August 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 31 October 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 November 1900.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 30 November 1900.

doubt will quiet the country very soon.'<sup>1</sup>

The comfortable existence did not last long. It soon became obvious to the military command that greater severity was required to tame the Boers. In December, De Wet threatened to invade Cape Colony. Haig and French were sent to Bloemfontein as part of a plan to surround the elusive Boer leader. Haig remained optimistic. He doubted that De Wet could accomplish much in Cape Colony:

Last year when the situation there was much more favourable for a rising the Dutch kept quiet. Why then should they rise now?<sup>2</sup>

He did not understand that the Cape Colony Dutch were tired of the war and as a result were becoming increasingly anti-British. For this reason raids like those by De Wet had a greater effect than they had had previously. Despite his general optimism, a degree of uncertainty was revealed in his letters during this period:

We have pretty well cleared this district of inhabitants and carried off most of the supplies, but there are still in parts mealies and forage hidden. So the idea is ridiculous to think the Boers can be starved into submission when they have such a vast area from which they can draw supplies . . .<sup>3</sup>

De Wet was headed off, but not captured. The war became increasingly ugly. Haig finally admitted that it was likely to last a long while. He told Henrietta to cancel her trip. 'I am afraid this country is so disturbed that I shall have . . . to ask you to delay.'<sup>4</sup>

Despite the setbacks, Haig remained confident of an eventually favourable outcome. He continually mocked soldiers and politicians

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 November 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 December 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 December 1900.



who were overcome by the 'funks'. One so afflicted was Kitchener:

French was at Pretoria yesterday and from what he tells me I gather that Kitchener is not in the best of spirits about the outlook. In fact from what I have seen myself, he (K) occasionally gets alarmed without real cause and hurries troops to this or that point without sufficiently considering, what the effect must be of denuding certain places of troops. So one is forced to conclude that the Sirdar is not the large minded man capable of taking a broad view of the whole situation which the papers would have us believe.<sup>1</sup>

To emphasise the difference between himself and Kitchener, Haig ended the letter with reference to his own high degree of composure.

There had been setbacks. Things were not moving as quickly as he had hoped they would. But the ending was no less certain.

'Every day shows a little progress and brings us nearer the end.'<sup>2</sup>

This steadfast belief in the inexorable progress towards a favourable conclusion was the source of Haig's strength and composure during every campaign in which he fought.

Some of this confidence undoubtedly resulted from Haig's high degree of self-assurance. He had done well in the war. As the campaign progressed, his fortunes continually improved. For instance, in January 1901 he was given a column of his own and sent to Cape Colony, where Boer raids had escalated. He commanded a force of all arms numbering 2,000 men. He described his duties in a letter to Henrietta:

If you will look at the map you will see the great area over which troops under my control are operating. The question of feeding, and keeping in communication with, the several parts of the column is at times difficult, while at the same time I have to assist in the administration of the districts thro' which I passed--all the magistrates nearly are disloyal and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population: indeed I may say all farmers are dutch.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 18 December 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 20 January 1901.

Haig welcomed the high level of activity. 'We are having a tremendous hunt after these wretches', he wrote. 'I enjoy myself very well.' He especially enjoyed his independence. The command was 'much more interesting than a Cavalry Brigade because . . . I can get no orders from anyone but merely move as I think best in pursuit of the Enemy.'<sup>1</sup>

Much of Haig's time was spent chasing Commandant Kritzinger, a particularly wily raider. Haig claimed that he nearly caught him 'once or twice' but failed when 'somehow everyone did not do exactly as required to ensure success'.<sup>2</sup> He did not elaborate. In March, Kitchener decided that Kritzinger was too big a problem for Haig's relatively small force to handle. He consequently put French on the chase with a larger force. Haig meanwhile was transferred to the Orange River Colony (previously Orange Free State) where he commanded a column of 2,700 men from a base at Thaba N'Chu. He had moderate success against raiders there. One month later, however, he was back in Cape Colony, on Kritzinger's trail again. Kitchener had lost his patience. The rapid shifting back and forth of troops is a measure of his frustration. This time, he instructed Haig to use even greater severity:

. . . I got an urgent order on the 7th of April . . . to go to Cape Colony at once to take command of certain columns. . . . I got a telegram on arrival here [Nauwpoort] from Lord K telling me to 'Take command of all columns operating in the Midland area of Cape Colony. Act vigorously with the object of clearing Cape Colony of the enemy as soon as possible.'<sup>3</sup>

In the early months of 1901, the Middleburg peace initiatives between

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 20 January 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 12 February 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1901.



Kitchener and Botha caused the former to stay his hand somewhat. Botha's rejection of the British offer on 16 March, and the anxiety caused by Kritzinger and others, brought about a change of policy. 'Act vigorously' was a euphemism for farm burnings, concentration camps, blockhouse lines and executions.

These measures had been used since January, but were applied with even greater frequency and intensity after April. This was especially true in Cape Colony, where Boer raids caused the greatest danger:

It is fully more difficult hunting Boers in this colony where all farmers are secretly their friends, and the Govt. almost seems to assist the invader, than in the Free State or Transvaal where one can trust everyone as an enemy.<sup>1</sup>

Haig had advocated more severe measures throughout the war. Now that the command agreed with him, he welcomed the change of policy and devoted himself to its ardent execution. He was honoured to be given such responsibility: 'It is very satisfactory to be again chosen for this job when things have got into a mess.'<sup>2</sup> The moral questions did not seem to bother him. Always a professional, he was interested solely in performing his duties with the maximum vigour:

I like the change of work down here to what I had in the Orange River Colony--there we merely cleared farms and made raids on them at night. But here the situation is different, some people say it is the most serious operation of the war, and causes a certain amount of anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

Neither the concentration camps, nor the suffering of women and children in them, were given much mention in his diaries or letters.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 April 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 19 April 1901.

Despite the change of policy, Haig still believed even greater severity was required. He felt that, in some cases, his hands were unjustifiably tied. On 8 July, for instance, he wrote that

I am afraid the authorities won't be able to hang the rebels we got here over a month ago: tho' I think they ought to be hung as two of our men died of wounds. There is too much 'law' and not enough rough and ready justice in this land.<sup>1</sup>

He welcomed the change which came two months later:

The authorities are all for blood now I hear! This will have a good effect. There were three men shot at Colesberg when I was there. I did not care to go and see the spectacle but all the local dutch magnates had to attend and a roll was called to see that they were present. I am told the sight was most impressive and everything went off well.<sup>2</sup>

In the Great War, Haig refused to visit casualty clearing stations because he feared they would damage his resolve.<sup>3</sup> When war became too ugly, he saw fit to isolate himself from its ugliness. Such action was not, he believed, reprehensible. Necessity demanded it.

One method which Kitchener used to control raiders was his system of blockhouse lines. In early 1901, he began to crisscross the country with barbed wire. The wire was reinforced at regular intervals by blockhouses manned with small numbers of troops. As the year progressed, the amount of wire and the frequency of the blockhouses increased. Haig was very proud of the line which he supervised:

Our blockhouse line seems a more complicated obstacle to cross than those in the Transvaal as we start with an obstacle between the houses of a dozen or more strands of barbed wire and then keep the garrisons of the block-

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 8 July 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 September 1901.

<sup>3</sup>See Haig Papers, Acc. 3155, No. 347/43 (file of miscellaneous letters and articles) for extensive discussion of this issue.



houses busy every day strengthening it with ditches and spring guns etc.<sup>1</sup>

The blockhouse system was the least effective of Kitchener's methods for controlling raids. De Wet felt it was more aptly called the 'blockhead system'--after the man who devised it. It was not an obstacle to the determined raider.

The English have been constantly boasting in their newspapers about the advantages of their blockhouses, but they have never been able to give an instance of a capture effected by them.<sup>2</sup>

De Wet concluded by remarking that 'the English seemed to think that a Boer might be netted like a fish.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig did not question the effectiveness of the blockhouse system, nor of any other measure. All contributed to the eventual success of the operation. 'Every day the situation here improves',<sup>4</sup> he again wrote on 25 August 1901. While Kitchener was accused of barbarity by the British public, Haig, in contrast, felt he was too lax. 'His periodical fits of funk'<sup>5</sup> disturbed the orderly and efficient execution of policy. In addition, Haig alleged that 'Lord K seems to meddle rather and does not give French quite a free hand'.<sup>6</sup> As to the overall effect of the harsh measures on the Colony, Haig believed it was positive:

. . . the more Cape Colony farmers who get ruined the better it will be for the country. The Dutch own the best farms, and the English farmers are beneath contempt! So both ought

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 April 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Christian De Wet, Three Years War, (London: Archibald Constable and Co.: 1902), pp. 321-322.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 25 August 1901.

<sup>5</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 28 July 1901.

<sup>6</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 September 1901.

to be cleared out; and so I feel sure that S. Africa  
is deriving good from the continuance of this war.<sup>1</sup>

The inferior character of the Dutch and English Afrikaner was a constant theme:

The dutch are so terribly indolent, that it is not to be wondered at that the country is so backward. The average English colonists too seems to have been (in the past) inferior to the Dutchman! Hence the secondary position which our colonists were content to occupy in the presence of the Dutch element.<sup>2</sup>

The war would solve the problem. Farm burnings and the forced movement of people would result in the undesirable elements being cleared away. New English settlers could then rush in to exploit the country's vast potential. Haig even advised his sister to invest some of her 'millions' in the 'new' South Africa.

In addition to his other duties, Haig reorganised the Cape Colony Intelligence Department in May 1901. The appointment was in recognition of his earlier success in this field. When he first was given a column in January, he became immediately aware of British inadequacies in Intelligence work. He improvised a system which had impressive results:

There being no system of Intelligence as yet organised under my command, I at once engaged several farmers and local men assisted by natives to act as scouts and spies, and I appointed Lt. Struben of the Middleburg Mounted Rifles to supervise and enlarge this intelligence service. These intelligence agents were sent out in various disguises, such as horse dealers, ostrich egg buyers, men in search of work, etc., towards the West, Southwest and South, so as to get ahead of the enemy, and report back by telegraph where the Boers had appeared and where they were expected.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 September 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 October 1901.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas Haig, contact copy of 'Report on Operations: January to March 1901', entry for 2 January. Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 38(g). The emphasis upon enemy intentions is notably different than during the Great War, when morale factors were the focus. See epilogue, pp. 370-371.



Throughout his career, Haig was keenly interested in Intelligence work. This was part of his determination to perform his duties in as complete a manner as possible. While the ruthlessness which he sometimes applied to his tasks can be questioned, his devotion to and enthusiasm for his work cannot.

This enthusiasm and devotion was noticed by his superiors. Both Kitchener and French frequently complimented Haig on his efficiency. Both looked to him whenever a difficult problem arose. Kitchener's praise is especially significant because it was seldom openly conveyed to anyone. On 8 February 1901, he sent Haig the following telegram:

You seem to be getting at them well . . . a little more and they will be done. . . . Tell all troops under your command I am very pleased with their exertions and hope they will soon finish with these raiders.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the war, French wrote a particularly ebullient letter to Hugo Haig:

I cannot tell you what a comfort and assistance Douglas has been to me here and throughout the whole campaign. He is a perfect Staff Officer--and my great hope is that I may live to see him rise to the highest position in the service. The further and higher he rises the better for the country and its Army.<sup>2</sup>

Because of his fine record in South Africa, French was given command of the 1st Army Corps, Aldershot, after the war. Yet it must be emphasised that his success, and therefore his promotion, was in large part due to Haig.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kitchener to Haig, telegram, 8 February 1901, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 6(c).

<sup>2</sup>French to Hugo Haig, 20 April 1900, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e). The irony of the letter in relation to 1914 and 1915 is striking. See epilogue, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup>The extent to which French relied upon Haig is evident in the former's Boer War diaries, included in the French manuscripts at the

Henrietta did not feel that French had sufficiently demonstrated his gratitude to her brother. She continued to discuss this matter with Wood, and conveyed her annoyance to Douglas. He replied:

. . . don't think for a moment that French has not done his best for me. He is only too anxious to help me on, but I think, in remaining as his Chief Staff Officer, I did the best for the Cavalry Division, for him and for myself. One did not foresee this war lasting so long, otherwise I might have taken some skallywag corps or other! So don't make a fuss about my being now in the same position I started in. Recollect also many have gone lower down!<sup>1</sup>

Haig's pleas did not alter Henrietta's conviction. She felt he had been wronged and was determined to do something about it.

She continued to pressure him, which caused him to respond as follows:

By the way the General mentioned to me that you had written to him some time ago and apparently conveyed the impression given you by Old Evelyn that he (General F) had not done all he could and might have done to push me on. Now as I have told you often, the General wrote to Evelyn several times about me, and to others recommending me for all sorts of things, so you are quite under a misapprehension and if anyone is to blame because I have not been made Commander-in-Chief, K.G. K.T. etc. etc. you must blame the late lady killer of Pall Mall and not poor French!<sup>2</sup>

Henrietta may have had some grounds for complaint. French did, in a letter to Haig on the subject of rewards, write 'I feel they have treated you very badly' and 'they won't get men to stand this treatment, and they will have then to put up with an inferior

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Imperial War Museum. Though these provide little quotable material --largely due to French's appallingly illegible handwriting--they are useful evidence of the Haig-French partnership.

<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 14 December 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 November 1901. The 'lady killer' was apparently Buller, who, after returning from South Africa, was forced to resign from the Army due to a still obscure scandal. On 26 October 1901, Haig wrote to Henrietta, 'How is your old lady killer getting on now that he has left Pall Mall? I am very sorry for the old man because he has really done a lot of good work in his time . . . I only hope that if I reach the age of decrepitude that I'll have the sense to go and grow cabbages, or do anything else but clog the military machine with antequated fads of a past generation.'



kind.' He added that he had repeatedly argued Haig's case with assorted individuals, including 'Evelyn Wood, Ian Hamilton, and even Bobs himself'.<sup>1</sup> But no evidence has been found to support this contention. The papers of Hamilton, Roberts and Kitchener contain many letters from French, none of which address this topic. When a vacancy in the command of the 17th Lancers developed, both Roberts and Kitchener wanted Haig for the post. French apparently did not. As Kitchener wrote to Roberts on 19 April 1901:

I have just heard from French that he thinks Lawrence should get the 17th, not that Haig is in every way fit but that Lawrence has more claim.<sup>2</sup>

To be fair, French favoured Herbert Lawrence because the latter had more seniority than Haig and was already a member of the regiment. But it is clear that French did not go out of his way to push Haig forward. It seems that, at least early in the war, this was due to the fact that French was not willing to part with such a valuable assistant.

French's advice was not taken, and Haig was given command of the 17th Lancers in May 1901. Roberts explained why in a letter to Kitchener which was in reply to the one quoted above:

I have telegraphed to you to send Herbert home. He ought not even to have been given the 17th Lancers. Haig has been selected to succeed him, and though you would, I daresay, like to keep him with a column, it is desirable he should take over command of the 17th . . . I would have appointed Lawrence as you suggested, but Haig seems to be the more capable and distinguished of all the younger cavalry soldiers . . .<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>French to Haig, 20 May 1901, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).

<sup>2</sup>Kitchener to Roberts, 19 April 1901, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/33/24.

<sup>3</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 4 May 1901, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/1. Roberts was referring in the first instance to Colonel J. Herbert, the incumbent commander of the 17th Lancers who was removed largely

The Lancers were on active service in South Africa. The appointment included promotion to full Colonel. After worrying about whether he would land an inferior regiment, or one which required a large income, this one perfectly suited Haig's tastes and means. 'They seem to be a lot of nice fellows',<sup>1</sup> he wrote after his first visit to the regiment in June. The post of regimental colonel did not, contrary to Roberts' letter, supersede his other duties as a column commander:

I took over command of the 17th Lancers last Thursday as I thought it best to identify myself with the regiment as soon as possible. . . . I have them here with me, and find I can easily look after the regiment in addition to directing the other columns. I know the country so well now that it does not bother me much to make up my mind where to send the latter to hunt the Enemy. Besides I am giving the Squadron Commanders a chance of having a little show occasionally on their own account. There is nothing so good as responsibility for making good officers.<sup>2</sup>

On one of these 'little shows', disaster struck. On 17 September,<sup>3</sup> 'C' Squadron was ambushed while defending a difficult position. Out of 130 men, 29 were killed, another 41 wounded. All the officers were either killed or wounded. Haig had become fond of the men of his regiment quite quickly. He was saddened by the loss. 'It made me miserable to see what had taken place', he wrote. 'The wounds were terrible, the brutes used explosive bullets.'<sup>4</sup>

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due to incapacity as a regimental commander. Lawrence, angered that Haig had been chosen over him, left the service and became a banker in London. He returned to the Army in 1914, and, ironically, became Haig's Chief of Staff in 1918.

<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 10 June 1901.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 July 1901.

<sup>3</sup>This date is estimated from Haig's correspondence and is not certain.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 22 Sept 1901. The allegation regarding explosive bullets may have been justified, since both sides used



The war changed little as 1901 ended and 1902 began. 'Progress was measured by the increasing size of the British force and the greater ruthlessness of the measures employed. April 1902 brought the first chance of a settlement since Middleburg. Botha, Steyn, Burger, De Wet, De la Rey and others met at Klerksdorp to discuss peace terms. The package they presented to Kitchener on the 12th was remarkably reasonable, but it did not include a surrender of independence by the Boer states. The British refused to countenance any proposal which did not include this essential point. The Boer leaders, however, felt they could not surrender their independence without consulting the commandos in the field. They decided to elect delegates to a meeting at Vereeniging, where the issue would be decided. First, however, the delegates who were chosen had to be located and informed of the meeting. In some cases, the British were called upon to assist. Haig, for instance, was responsible for ensuring that Jan Smuts made his way safely to the meeting. In the Great War, Haig formed a very high opinion of Smuts. In 1902, he was not as admiring. 'I suppose I'll have Smuts here shortly', he wrote grudgingly to Henrietta. 'He was State Attorney at Pretoria, and was at Cambridge, so is more or less civilised.'<sup>2</sup>

Haig was sceptical of the 'meeting of the people' scheduled for 15 May at Vereeniging:

I wonder who will compose 'the people'! and whether they will vote for surrender. I expect that if Lord K were to put them on half rations in the rest camps for a week or two they would all vote for surrender!<sup>2</sup>

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them. They were outlawed by the Hague Convention of 1899, but were still in the stocks of both armies and were undoubtedly used. See Holt, The Boer War, p. 116.

<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 20 April 1898.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Politics was superseding force in the efforts to solve the crisis.

As the shift took place, Haig's confusion grew:

I suppose the 'leaders' must have come to some sort of agreement with our Govt. before this meeting (to ratify some agreement apparently) could have been summoned. But I hope that there is no question of giving terms to these rebels. It would be much better to go on fighting for 10 years than to give way in anything to them.<sup>1</sup>

The Treaty of Vereeniging was signed on 31 May. The terms were reasonable. Independence was surrendered, but the British made concessions on the treatment of ex-soldiers, the teaching of Afrikans in the schools, the owning of firearms and other points. 'A representative system tending towards autonomy' was to be introduced 'as soon as circumstances permit it'.<sup>2</sup> Haig took a remarkably balanced view of the settlement: 'My own opinion is that the proclamation is right enough provided Martial Law is maintained in this Cape Colony for another three years.'<sup>3</sup> This would give the British time to weed out inferior or dangerous elements and generally to mould the country as they saw fit.

With the war over, Haig's duties immediately changed. On 12 June, he wrote as follows from Calvinia:

I am busy here trying to get these Boer commandants to concentrate their commandoes at suitable places for General Smuts to see them and arrange for them to lay down their arms. The difficulty is due to the absence of food in the district as we have cleared the country as thoroughly as possible outside our Blockhouse line, and I decline to allow them to come South of that line until they have layed down their arms.<sup>4</sup>

He was given command of a district composed of a 'triangle of about

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 20 April 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted from Holt, The Boer War, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 June 1902.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 12 June 1902.



60 miles each side, and including the main line from Capetown to Kimberley'.<sup>1</sup> His force consisted of four battallions of infantry, two of mounted infantry, one cavalry regiment and various artillery detachments. 'I am lucky to have got such a command for Peace time',<sup>2</sup> he admitted. The appointment included promotion to the local rank of Brigadier General.

As usual, Haig underestimated the amount of time required to restore order. In June, he anticipated that 'a month or two should see me on the way to England'.<sup>3</sup> But progress was slow. As the winter wore on, his letters became increasingly despondent:

Martial Law will soon be a dead letter but they have no police in sufficient numbers to keep order, and I fear the loyalists and those who have helped us will have a bad time.<sup>4</sup>

He focused blame in the usual direction:

I question whether the Govt. in England know the real state of feeling in this Colony, and I am certain that the Govt. of Cape Colony know very little about the feeling in the Districts . . . The govt. here seem like a lot of schoolboys, quite happy and thoughtless of the future.<sup>5</sup>

Early in the war, when British affairs were in a bad state, Haig blamed the government at home. 'I would disband the Politicians for 10 years', he suggested. 'We would all be better off without them!'<sup>6</sup> The war and the peace reinforced this attitude. The Empire, he believed, had been built by the military. He was certain that it would be torn down by the politicians.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 29 June 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 12 June 1902.

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 13 July 1902.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 February 1900.

Haig's attitudes toward post-war South Africa reveal a naivete common among professional soldiers. He was accustomed to the solving of problems through the application of force. He did not understand that the military solution is never a complete one. Force changed sovereignty; it did not change men's minds. The South African problem demanded insight and imagination which Haig did not possess. He could not understand why the Bond--the traditional party of the Dutch Afrikaner--continued to gain a majority in the Cape Colony. Farm burnings, executions and concentration camps had not significantly altered political alignments. When Haig finally realised this, his reaction was characteristically simple-minded. He favoured suspending the constitution until a better result could be assured. He railed against 'windbags like Seddon and some of the other colonials'<sup>1</sup> who did not appreciate the wisdom of this solution. He gave a dire warning for the future:

Anyhow I am quite convinced that if the Politicians are allowed to have their way in this country that the country will be entirely Dutch and natives in 20 years time and England merely will exist at Capetown.<sup>2</sup>

Haig's attacks on the politicians and the colonists became increasingly virulent. His last letter from South Africa revealed a loss of hope:

Things seem to be turning out badly in this colony. Fancy a rebel member of the Parliament (Te Water) who fled the country on account of his fear of punishment for his misdeeds being received by the Prime Minister with open arms and allowed to sit on the Treasury bench with him. I went to the House of the Legislative Assembly the other day: it almost makes one ill to see the brutes and to hear them talk.<sup>3</sup>

Haig ended by advising 'a general smash up of all political parties

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 August 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 September 1902.



and arrangements in the hopes of gathering together the least hurtful elements . . .'<sup>1</sup> He was out of place in a political environment where military force had suddenly become impotent. It was time for him to leave.

The 17th Lancers were supposed to be one of the garrison regiments for post-war South Africa. Haig therefore expected to stay in the country for another two years. In August, these plans were suddenly changed. The Scots Greys replaced the Lancers, and the latter were sent home. Haig left with them, on 23 September. It was exactly three years since he had left England. During the time, his career had flourished. He began the war as a staff officer of a small cavalry force. He ended it a local Brigadier General in command of a large area and a massive force of all arms. He served in every part of South Africa and met success everywhere. While the careers of some officers were destroyed in the war, Haig's prestige had soared. At the end of the war, French wanted him at Aldershot and Kitchener wanted him in India. He had emerged as one of the men destined to shape the Army of the new century. He was determined to use the lessons learned in South Africa to shape it as he saw fit.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 September 1902.

## Chapter VII

### The Cavalry Reaction, 1902-1906



The Boer War had two main effects upon Douglas Haig. The first was that it confirmed his faith in the cavalry and in the tactical principles at the heart of his traditional cavalry training. The second effect was that Haig's success as a cavalry officer in a mobile war gave him the exposure which projected him into the Army's front rank. Thus, by successfully pursuing tactical doctrines of the past, Haig ironically became recognised as a soldier of the future. These two effects made the Boer War the pivotal point in Haig's career. By 1902 his development as a soldier was virtually complete. No subsequent event substantially altered the 'truths' which had been confirmed in South Africa. From 1902 to 1914, therefore, the focus is shifted to Haig's consolidation of his position in the Army and his exploitation of the reputation he had so far gained.

Various explanations have been given for Haig's rise to the top of the Army. Terraine feels that Haig's ability was the most important factor. He argues that natural and acquired talents separated him from his contemporaries. Charteris emphasises Haig's character; Duff Cooper his character and ability. Haig's critics offer different explanations. Dixon feels ambition--the 'pathological achievement motivation'--was most important. Many others, Lloyd George among them, feel Haig could be ruthless and unprincipled, and that this allowed him to ride to the top on the backs of others. All of these arguments are inconclusive because they are too exclusive. There is no simple explanation for Haig's rise because that rise was not a simple process. Haig needed a wide range of resources, both admirable and otherwise, in order to succeed. His success is evidence that he possessed these resources in the necessary proportions.

The search for a simple explanation has meant that a significant motivating force--Haig's overwhelming sense of duty--has not been given its deserved emphasis. Haig believed that he owed a debt to the British Empire. He was driven forward by a determination to fulfil this obligation. To do one's duty for King and Country is an attitude often misunderstood in today's materialistic, individualistic world. There is a tendency to question whether the desire was genuine and an eagerness to discover selfish motives underneath the surface. Haig's sense of duty was genuine, and largely unselfish. It was not, however, unique. His willingness to serve his country was no different from that of contemporaries of similar social background. Yet there was a distinguishing feature in Haig's case. Combined with his sense of duty was a belief that his service was inherently more valuable than could be that of his contemporaries. He had this feeling from a very early age. But it was most evident after the Boer War. By this time, Haig's career had taken on a momentum of its own. As he rose within his profession he became ever more certain of the rectitude of his ideals, and more determined to shape the Army in his way.

Haig usually preferred to express himself through actions, not words. Yet he did, on one occasion write down his feelings regarding duty and Empire. His nephew Hugo was, in 1902, debating whether to leave the Army and take his place as a member of the landed gentry.<sup>1</sup> He eventually decided to stay in the military, a decision which his uncle applauded:

I think you are quite right to let Ramornie for a period. It would be absurd for a lad of your years and without any real experience of the Empire and its inhabitants to settle down into a turnip grower in Fife. Leave these pursuits

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<sup>1</sup>Hugo Haig had served in South Africa, for a time on French's staff, and later rose to the rank of Colonel.



until you get into the doldering age! Meantime do your best to become a worthy citizen of the Empire. . . . It has been your good fortune not only to become a soldier, but to have served and risked your life for the Empire--you must continue to do so, and consider that it is a privilege and not that by doing so you are losing time and money.<sup>1</sup>

The distinguishing feature of Haig's sense of duty--the sense of superiority--is evident later in the letter:

The gist of the whole thing is that I am anxious not only that you should realise your duty to your family, your Country and to Scotland, but also to the whole Empire--'Aim High' as the Book says, 'perchance ye may attain.' Aim at being worthy of the British Empire and possibly in the evening of your life you may be able to own to yourself that you are fit to settle down in Fife. At present you are not, so be active, and busy. Don't let . . . mediocrities about you deflect you from your determination to belong to the few who can command or guide or benefit our great Empire. Believe me, the reservoir of such men is not boundless. As our Empire grows, so is there a greater demand for them, and it behoves everyone to do his little and try and qualify for as high a position as possible. It is not ambition. This is duty.<sup>2</sup>

Haig believed that he was one of the 'few'. His statements above may be taken as accurate representations of his feelings. Haig was ruthless and ambitious, but he believed sincerely that such attitudes were cleansed and sanctified when expressed in the interests of Empire.

The strict sense of duty can also be seen in Haig's post-war deliberations regarding his next appointment. After the Boer War, French wanted Haig at Aldershot, and Kitchener wanted him as Inspector General of Cavalry in India. Haig favoured the former appointment. After three years away, he was eager for a long spell in Britain. He was, however, sceptical about his chances of joining French:

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<sup>1</sup>The letter is no longer in the Haig collection, but it is quoted in Duff Cooper, Haig, pp. 90-92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

I fancy the excellent house at Aldershot in which the General Officer Commanding Cavalry Brigade lives, will oblige Lord Roberts to select the husband of 'Dear Mrs.' so and so because the nursery rooms will exactly suit the family!--and I'll be given the Indian appointment.<sup>1</sup>

While he admitted that he 'would prefer the Aldershot Brigade of course', he accepted that 'the other is a fine appointment too . . . with great opportunities of keeping one's hand in handling mounted troops.'<sup>2</sup> The sarcasm above therefore seems to have been more the result of continued animosity towards Roberts than real bitterness over the possibility of having to go to India. He was ready to accept his fate wherever it led him and would do his duty in whatever capacity the authorities decided. As he expressed it, 'The main thing is to have men to command no matter what they call me.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig's scepticism was, however, warranted. Roberts decided that the Aldershot Brigade should go to someone else. The Indian appointment became Haig's.<sup>4</sup> This meant that he had to spend a year in limbo, as the incumbent's term in India did not expire until October 1903. During this year he was, simply, Commanding Officer of the 17th Lancers. Though the Lancers were at this time stationed in Edinburgh, Haig was not happy to return to his birthplace. When he first heard of the plans, he wrote that 'Edinburgh is a bad place for Cavalry--no drill ground and half the regiment on detachment.'

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 25 August 1902.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 August 1902.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 18 August 1902.

<sup>4</sup>While it is not clear whether Roberts ever seriously considered Haig for the Aldershot appointment, he did feel Haig was suited for the Indian one. He wrote to Kitchener on 20 February 1902: 'I wrote the King yesterday about your wish to have Haig as Insp. General of Cavalry in India. His Majesty will be somewhat exercised at so junior an officer being appointed, but I have pointed out that Haig is quite unusually fitted for such a position. Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/5.'



He tried, through French, to have the station changed to Aldershot or York--'any place is better . . . than Edinburgh'.<sup>1</sup> French could do nothing. Haig dutifully went to Edinburgh, where he found life exceedingly dull. He had never enjoyed the regimental routine. This attitude did not change when he became a commanding officer. After leading 2,500 men in war, leading 800 in peace was drudgery. While he performed his duties well, there is no doubt that he thirsted for action. As usual the diary is the best indicator of his level of activity and his style of life. The 1903 diary contains long periods without any entries. This reflects a lack of significant incidents, not a lack of time to write. Those entries which do exist are devoted to brief descriptions of grouse shooting, hunting, golf at Muirfield and the ubiquitous polo. Hardly any attention is given to regimental matters.

The year did provide two notable diversions. In July, Haig participated in the Inter-Regimental Polo Tournament as captain of the 17th Lancers. In the final, which took place on the 11th, the Lancers faced the Blues before a Royal audience at Hurlingham. In the Royal Box with Queen Alexandra was her lady-in-waiting, The Honourable Dorothy Maud Vivian, the future Countess Haig. Years later, she described the match in her biography of her husband:

To the surprise of all, the game did not progress as expected. The Blues did not seem to be getting on well. Their play became wild, whilst the team of the 17th Lancers continued a steady, combined game. Everyone noted that the strong player who never missed, nor sent a crooked shot, and who kept the whole team together, was Colonel Douglas Haig, playing back. Many comments were made in the Royal Box about the Colonel's remarkable play and his alert, smart appearance.<sup>2</sup>

The Lancers won by five goals to one. The Queen presented the cup

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 17 September 1902.

<sup>2</sup>The Countess Haig, The Man I Knew, pp.31-32.

to Colonel Haig. Miss Vivian did not get to speak to the Colonel, who, she noted, was known at that time as 'rather a woman-hater'.<sup>1</sup>

The second important event came in October when Haig was presented with the C.V.O. while staying at Balmoral. He described the event in his diary:

His Majesty presents me with the C.V.O. and a walking stick.

C.V.O. in recognition of the services which I had rendered in the past and would render in the future as I. G. of Cavalry in India, and also as 'a mark of H.M.'s personal esteem.'

The stick as a remembrance of my visit.<sup>2</sup>

Haig saw the C.V.O. in a different light than military medals. It, and the attention of the King, were symbolic not only of past achievements, but also of future social standing. He was thrilled to be a member of the King's inner circle--as evidenced by his delight when he told Henrietta that 'His Majesty has desired me to write to him when I go to India.'<sup>3</sup>

Haig's departure for India was delayed somewhat by his work on Cavalry Training, the manual which was being revised due to changes made necessary by the Boer War. Work on the manual aggravated the long-running conflict between the traditionalists--men like Haig and French--and the reformers--Roberts, Hamilton and Kitchener, among many others. Though many issues divided the two groups, the focus of contention lay with the issue of mounted or dismounted action. The traditionalists naturally believed that the offensive potential of the arm had not been altered by the progress of military technology and that the charge was as valid a manoeuvre as ever. They therefore felt that mounted training

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<sup>1</sup>The Countess Haig, The Man I Knew, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 4 October 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 4 October 1903.



should receive the greatest emphasis in the manual. The reformers, on the other hand, felt that modern weaponry had given rise to a situation wherein 'knee to knee charges in future will be few and far between'.<sup>1</sup> This did not mean that the cavalry would become obsolete; at no time did Roberts want to abolish the arm. What he and the other reformers wanted was to make the rifle the cavalry's main weapon. Since cavalrymen could not shoot from a speeding horse, the majority of their fighting would, as a result, take place dismounted. The horse would become simply a means of mobility rather than a tactical weapon in and of itself. The new role of the cavalry meant that the arme blanche would be severely diminished in importance. 'Instead of the firearm being adjunct of the sword,' Roberts argued, 'the sword must henceforth be adjunct of the rifle.'<sup>2</sup>

As was mentioned at the beginning of the last chapter, the Boer War produced a 'range of common experiences' which were open to widely varied subjective interpretations. Because the war provided few indisputable lessons, it exacerbated the disagreements between traditionalists and reformers. No one questioned that the war had been a mobile one in which the cavalry was given an unusually large role. Disagreement instead centred on the quality of the cavalry's performance in one of the arm's greatest chances of the nineteenth century. Roberts felt that many of the failures and setbacks of the war were due to the unwillingness of cavalry leaders to recognise the need for new tactics. The clever, adaptable Boers had, he felt, proved themselves better cavalrymen. Another reformer, Erskine Childers, described the differences between Boer and British horsemen

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 2 March 1904. Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/13.

<sup>2</sup>Roberts, preface to Cavalry Training (Provisional) H.M.S.O., 1904. The sentence was borrowed from Kitchener. See page 249.

in a letter to Roberts:

It was the Boer dash based on the rifle alone that cost us so many smarting reverses during the last year and a half and it was lack of dash on our side, caused largely by the old, inveterate, ingrained reliance on the arme blanche with a consequent reluctance to take a bold, logical grasp of the immense possibilities of the rifle, that prevented our Cavalry from setting the example of effective retaliation by tactics similar to those of the Boers.<sup>1</sup>

Roberts opinions were virtually the same. His disappointment with British cavalry leadership is reflected in the fact that he dismissed twenty-one senior officers, including 11 of 17 regimental commanders during his eleven months of field command in the Boer War.<sup>2</sup>

The traditionalists argued that the cavalry had performed remarkably well in the Boer War, under extremely difficult circumstances. Haig's pride in the arm after Kimberley and indeed throughout the entire war has already been shown. To him, the cavalry had 'saved the Empire', while the infantry or mounted infantry by themselves probably would have lost it. Haig did not argue that the cavalry's record in South Africa was without blemishes. But blame for the failures he laid conveniently at the door of the politicians and military leaders at home. Because of them, the supply of quality horses had been inadequate. Likewise, the government, he alleged, had tried to improvise by making mounted infantry into cavalry. Simply stated, he believed that traditional tactics would have been shown to be as relevant as ever, had the

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<sup>1</sup>Erskine Childers to Roberts, 4 November 1908, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/222. In 1910, Childers published War and the Arme Blanche, (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), a convincing attack on the traditionalists argument. But by the time it was published, as will be seen, authority over cavalry matters had shifted conclusively to the traditionalists.

<sup>2</sup>See Spiers, 'British Cavalry 1902-1914', p. 72.



cavalry been given the right amount of quality horses and properly-trained men.

After Roberts returned from South Africa and resumed his administrative duties as Commander-in-Chief, he tried to use the authority of his office to put into practice what he believed were the lessons of the Boer War. The work on Cavalry Training produced the first great clash with the traditionalists. Roberts was determined to make the manual into a primer on dismounted action. He diligently supervised the writing, rather than, as was customary, leaving the task to the senior cavalry officers. He was fully prepared for serious disagreements with Haig, as evidenced by the 24 September 1903 letter to Kitchener:

I am to have a meeting tomorrow of all the Senior Cavalry Officers about the proper method of training for their branch of the service. Haig, I am surprised to find, still clings to the old arme blanche system, and in the Chapter for the Revised Edition of the Drill Book, which was entrusted to him to write, on Collective Training, there is not one word about Artillery or Dismounted Fire. Haig, supported by French and Scobell, insists on Cavalry Soldiers being taught to consider the sword the chief weapon, and the rifle as a kind of auxiliary one . . . I am all in favour of Cavalry soldiers being bold riders, and endeavouring to overthrow their enemies' mounted men, but I am convinced that in 99 cases out of a hundred this will be done more effectively by Artillery and dismounted fire in the first instance.<sup>1</sup>

The clash was as Roberts expected. Haig described it as follows:

Attend meeting of Officers under Presidency of Lord Roberts at War Office re Cavalry Questions.

I strongly maintain that the chief method of action is the mounted role. He hotly opposes me . . .<sup>2</sup>

The wrangle over the manual continued for some time. Roberts' efforts were undoubtedly made easier by Haig's eventual departure

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 24 September 1903, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/6.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 25 September 1903.

for India. The Commander-in-Chief was able to push through the desired reforms to the manual. He did not, by any means, change Haig's mind. Without the support of the cavalry's leading spokesman, the new manual was virtually worthless.

The second great clash between Roberts and the traditionalists occurred over the issue of the lance. Roberts felt that arming cavalry with carbines made the lance superfluous. He therefore sought to abolish the weapon. Unlike Childers, Churchill<sup>1</sup> and others, Roberts did not advocate the complete abolition of the arme blanche. Swordless cavalry, he believed, would be similar to infantry deprived of bayonets; the ability to surprise would be hindered. The reformers saw the lance as a clumsy weapon which impeded the cavalryman's ability to use his rifle effectively. The traditionalists naturally did not agree. Since they did not believe that the charge was a thing of the past, they could not accept that the lance was obsolete. The officers of the Lancer regiments, Haig included, were naturally most adamant in their opposition to Roberts. Haig expressed his opinion in a letter to an M.P. and former 17th Lancer:

Personally I think our regiments of Cavalry should be armed in equal proportions, viz. half the Cavalry should have swords; the other lances . . . I don't think it is wise to abolish the lance.

Strategical reconnaissance must culminate in a tactical collision if the enemy possesses Cavalry; we want the lance for this.<sup>2</sup>

The fallacy in the argument lies in the last sentence. Roberts correctly maintained that 'Haig . . . inclines to the lance though

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<sup>1</sup>Witness Kitchener to Roberts, 5 May 1904: 'I think what does harm is young Churchill . . . . going too far and saying chuck both lance and sword . . .', Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/29/Q30.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to 'Jessel', 14 February 1903, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).



he can have had no experience of its use in war.<sup>1</sup> Nor would the future provide him with any such experiences. As Bond argues:

. . . the dogmas persisted that the next great European war would be virtually decided by a great opening cavalry clash, and that only cavalry armed with lance and sabre could defeat cavalry similarly armed . . .<sup>2</sup>

Haig was caught in a vicious circle from which only foresight could free him. He had little of this. Like French--who claimed that 'nothing can make me alter the views that I hold on the subject of cavalry'<sup>3</sup>--Haig could not or would not accept that long-range rifles, deadly machine guns and powerful artillery would annihilate Lancers before they could even attempt to prove the worth of their beloved weapons.

The experience at Kimberley made it impossible for Haig to understand the effect which technology had had upon the cavalry. The relief, he believed, conclusively demonstrated the moral effect of the charge and therefore the continued offensive potential of the arm as a whole. But, as has been shown, Kimberley was not a classical charge. The arme blanche was not used. Success resulted solely from the storming of a weak position by an overwhelming force. The cavalry did not fight, they simply rode. The infantry would have had a similar, albeit slower, effect. But the magnitude of the occasion blinded men to its real nature. Haig saw it as the quint-essential cavalry action. Its effect can be seen in the following statement:

. . . it is not the weapon carried but the moral factor of an apparently irresistible force, coming on at highest

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 30 June 1903, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/5.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry, 1870-1914', in The Theory and Practice of War, ed. Michael Howard, previously cited, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>French to Roberts, 6 November 1904, Roberts Papers 7101/23/30/8.

speed in spite of rifle fire, which affects the nerves and aim of the rapidly dismounted rifleman. . . .

I ask those who have felt the elation of a successful charge or who have known the despondency which attacks those who have been ridden over by the horseman whom they have fired at in vain, whether magazine fire; which makes the shooting so erratic, hurried and much less easily controlled, and spends the ammunition so quickly, has really so much changed the conditions of 30 years ago?<sup>1</sup>

Conditions had in fact changed radically. They had changed even before Haig entered the Army. Haig could vividly describe the scene which he himself had never experienced because it was a part of the cavalry dogma. Its constant repetition over the previous twenty years had worn a groove in his mind.

The argument for retention of the lance was thus based not only on tactical but more importantly on ethereal grounds. French stated before the Elgin Commission of 1903 that 'if the Cavalryman is taught to rely mainly on his rifle, his morale is taken away from him, and if that is done his power is destroyed.'<sup>2</sup> To the traditionalists, cavalymen deprived of lances were like Samson shorn. They feared that without the arme blanche, the cavalry spirit would dissipate. This spirit had thrived while the cavalry was in decline because it had as its base cherished military values such as bravery, devotion and self-sacrifice. The spirit was not a chimera. It did have a factual basis. In combat, no other arm fought with the same combination of speed and proximity to the enemy as the cavalry. The cavalry fought at close quarters--man to man. The clash of two rapidly converging lines of horsemen did inspire emotions and demand virtues unmatched by the other arms, who mostly fought well distanced

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, unsigned review of Cavalry Training (Canada, 1907), in Lord Dundonald, My Army Life, (London: Edward Arnold, 1926), pp. 252-3.

<sup>2</sup>Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in British Cavalry, 1870-1914', p. 109.



from the enemy. The cult of the arme blanche and the survival of the cavalry spirit were a 'last desperate effort to withstand the depersonalisation of war.'<sup>1</sup> But the fact remained that modern weaponry had depersonalised war. Technology had severely reduced the number of actions in which moral factors were crucial. With the charge a thing of the past, the arme blanche became functionally obsolete and the cavalry spirit little more than a quaint piece of nostalgia.

Roberts was able to abolish the lance in 1904. When combined with his victory on the manual, his success against the traditionalists seems impressive. But his reforms were short-lived. When the post of Commander-in-Chief was abolished in late 1904, he lost the power to convert his beliefs into policy. While he continued as the spokesman for the cavalry reformers, his real energies were shifted to the fight for Universal Service. No one replaced him as the bane of the traditionalists. Roberts' departure as a result brought a return to traditional principles of cavalry organisation and training. In 1907 a new Cavalry Training was published, with the heretical elements of the 1904 edition purged from it. In 1909 the lance was re-introduced. By 1910, eighty per cent of the training schedule of the Aldershot Cavalry Brigade was devoted to shock tactics. The remaining time was divided equally between reconnaissance and dismounted exercises. Roberts' efforts had had little lasting effect:

Although the Cavalry was better armed and better trained in 1914, it still entered the First World War as wedded to shock tactics as it had been in 1899.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in British Cavalry 1870-1914', p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Spiers, 'The British Cavalry, 1902-1914', p. 79.

Spiers cites two 'principle/anomalies' in Roberts' reform measures which the traditionalists were quick to exploit after 1904. The first was the incomplete abolition of the lance. The weapon was not abolished in India, nor was its use in parades, on escort duty or in other ceremonial occasions affected. Thus, by bending the rules only slightly, Lancers could continue to practice with their weapons almost as often as before. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle addressed this problem in a letter to the Pall Mall Gazette:

There is no use in parading one thing in peace time and another in war, in scouring the heaths of Aldershot with swords and lances, but reserving the rifle, and the rifle-man's habit of mind for real business. We must be logical and whole-hearted in this matter. The change should be thorough. I will never believe that it has been effected until I see a hundred lightly equipped men, with rifles slung on their backs and bandoliers across their chests, riding behind the King's State Carriage, in the place of the present picturesque but mediaeval guard.<sup>1</sup>

The second anomaly was the failure of the reformers to establish an effective alternative mounted force. The cavalry had come under severe criticism from as early as 1870. Yet the mounted infantry, which was intended as a force able to exploit both the mobility of the horse and the advantages of modern weaponry, in fact turned out to be a queer and disappointing hybrid. It suffered from a lack of funding, training and enthusiasm--the latter both from within and without. Haig wrote to Jessel that 'no country can afford to maintain mounted troops of different values'.<sup>2</sup> He was absolutely right. The existence of two types of mounted troops implied that the cavalry in its traditional form was still considered valuable and relevant. The very real failures of the mounted infantry in South Africa--seldom the fault of the soldiers involved--likewise

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, letter to Pall Mall Gazette, 6 April 1910.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Jessel, 14 February 1903, previously cited.



reinforced the idea that the cavalry was the wiser alternative.<sup>1</sup>

The main reason for the success of the traditionalists was the prestige and power of Haig and French. The reputations gained by both men in the Boer War partially obscured their antequated tactical principles. After the war both men rose to various influential positions from which they were able to frustrate efforts at cavalry reform. Haig, perhaps more than French, had the added advantage of being in other areas a genuine progressive. Within the Army, he was admired as one of the new breed of educated professionals, a soldier of the future. Thus, with Haig as the cavalry's leading spokesman, the image of the arm as a whole was naturally enhanced. This again demonstrates the blend of the traditional and the progressive which was such a factor in Haig's development as a soldier and in his rise within the Army. Though seemingly contradictory, these two elements can be explained. Haig's progressivism was directed toward improving the administrative efficiency of the Army. His ideas in organisational, educational and training spheres were inspired by a desire for a truly professionalised Army. He believed that the fundamental principles of this Army--its traditions--were sound, and therefore essential to preserve. To him, reform of the cavalry constituted an attack on these principles. Such reforms questioned the sacred doctrines of war. An attack upon the cavalry spirit eroded the Army's ideological core. It was therefore not to be tolerated.

The blend of the progressive and the traditional was reflected in Haig's approach to his duties as Inspector General of Cavalry in India. According to Charteris:

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<sup>1</sup>These anomalies are discussed in greater detail in Spiers, 'The British Cavalry', pp. 78-79.

The Indian Cavalry under the influence of many of its officers who had served in South Africa with mounted infantry units was permeated with the new doctrines and looked for the approval of the new Inspector-General. There was a rude awakening. Haig would have none of it. Both at his inspection of regiments, and still more by means of his training memoranda and staff rides, he taught unceasingly to his cavalry in India that warfare still offered scope for horse and man and bare steel.<sup>1</sup>

As will be seen, Haig turned the Indian Cavalry into a functionally efficient but tactically obsolete unit. He used his usual progressive training methods for regressive ends. An indicator of his priorities can be found in his schedule of inspection, an impressive piece of administration. The top of the list was dominated by traditional subjects: drill, order, wheeling, charging and squadron versus squadron mock battles. The eleventh and final item was shooting and dismounted drill.<sup>2</sup>

Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief in India, believed in the necessity for cavalry reform. Though he was perhaps not as wholehearted in his efforts as Roberts, he did give the latter valuable support on the issue of the lance and on Cavalry Training. As Roberts wrote to Kitchener on 30 June 1903:

I am glad to get your opinion about the lance, it will help me with the King, who was somewhat regretting that weapon having been done away with, after he had some conversation with Haig at Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup>

Since Haig was eager to train the Indian Cavalry along traditional lines, it is natural that he disagreed with Kitchener while the two worked together. This was especially the case since Roberts repeatedly asked Kitchener to 'keep Haig in the right line'<sup>4</sup> on the

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup>Schedule included in 12 November 1903 letter to Henrietta.

<sup>3</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 30 June 1903, previously cited.

<sup>4</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 24 September 1903, previously cited.



cavalry issues. 'Haig is one of the strongest supporters of the sword and charging', Roberts wrote on 8 October 1903. 'You will have to be very firm with him. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Four days after Haig's arrival in India, he had his first meeting with Kitchener. Cavalry issues naturally dominated the conversation. Haig recorded that Kitchener was 'quite at one with me regarding method of cavalry action, namely offensive tactics.'<sup>2</sup> In actuality, this seems to have been wishful thinking on Haig's part. Kitchener had a different opinion about the conversation as evidenced by his subsequent letter to Roberts:

Haig has arrived and I have had one talk with him and mean to have another. He seems to have a wrong idea that the morale of the cavalry will be injured by dismounted training. I have told him I disagree with this, that while I do not wish in any way to injure the dash and power of shock tactics of cavalry they must understand that whereas in the old days the carbine was the adjunct to the sword or lance, now the sword or lance must be the adjunct to the rifle and its practice.<sup>3</sup>

A number of weeks later, Roberts' continuing aggravation over Cavalry Training caused him to return to the subject of Haig in a letter to Kitchener:

The revised Cavalry Training is getting on, and I hope it will be published next month. A good deal of it was started by Haig, with some of whose ideas about cavalry I do not agree, and consequently much of his work has had to be rewritten. . . . I consider it quite a misfortune that Haig should be of the Old School in regard to the role of the Cavalry in the field. He is a clever, able fellow and his views have a great effect on French . . . I only hope that you may be able to get Haig to change his mind, or as Inspector<sup>4</sup> General of Cavalry he may do a great deal of mischief.

Kitchener followed Roberts' advice, and was pleased with his

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 8 October 1903, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/6.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 3 November 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Kitchener to Roberts, 5 November 1903, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/29/Q17.

<sup>4</sup>Roberts to Kitchener, 28 January 1904, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/7.

subsequent conversation with Haig. On 5 May Kitchener reassured

Roberts:

I think someone must have given you the wrong impression about Haig. I have only just arrived here so I have not been able to go into his work in detail but I had a long talk and he certainly never referred to old-fashioned charges, he quite agrees with what I wrote about cavalry [to you] and told me so more than once.<sup>1</sup>

In his diary, Haig confirmed that he and Kitchener had found much upon which to agree.<sup>2</sup>

This harmony was shattered after another meeting on the cavalry manual a week later. This time, many areas of conflict were discovered. In a subsequent letter to Roberts, Kitchener outlined Haig's objections, and ended with a highly perceptive analysis of Haig's fears:

I have had a long talk with Haig. It was not quite satisfactory because though he agrees with my views he always seems to hark back as if something more was intended or that he was afraid that more was intended than was said.

. . . The cavalry are I think evidently very nervous that more is intended than is written down [in the manual] and that training for the role they can now perform with their rifle, they may lose the power or spirit to attack the enemy's cavalry when it is necessary and they have the opportunity of so doing. I can see no reason why they should not do both equally well.

Haig's defence of the traditional cavalry principles had developed into a paranoia. He was afraid that to give ground on the issue of dismounted training would eventually result in the complete collapse of the arm. This fear caused him to distrust even the relatively moderate Kitchener. Had the two men continued along these opposing courses, a serious conflict would undoubtedly have developed.

In fact, a conflict was avoided. After May 1904, the cavalry

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<sup>1</sup>Kitchener to Roberts, 5 May 1904, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/29/Q30.

<sup>2</sup>See Diary, 4 May 1904.

<sup>3</sup>Kitchener to Roberts, 12 May 1904, Roberts Papers, 7101/23/122/7.



issue almost completely disappears from Haig's diaries and Kitchener's letters. Haig was allowed to train the Indian Cavalry virtually as he wished. A serious clash was avoided because Kitchener's attention was distracted by other issues. He was at this time involved in a major confrontation with the Viceroy, Lord Curzon. At issue was the role of the Military Member of Council. This officer was junior in rank to Kitchener, and yet, by virtue of his position on this administrative body, could intervene in the Commander-in-Chief's affairs. Since the Viceroy controlled the council, the Military Member was essentially in Curzon's pocket. Kitchener objected to this interference and threatened to resign if the imbalance was not corrected. Haig quite naturally sided with him:

K . . . would much prefer a billet such as Cromer has in Egypt. The C. in C. in India has really very little power, as all the Supply, Transport, Remounts and finance are under an individual called the 'Military Member of Council'. This is to say Lord K may order men to Thibet, but he does not know whether they will starve or not because he has nothing to do with the supply arrangements. Such a system is obviously ridiculous. It is like a pair of horses in double harness without a coachman. The latter ought to be the Viceroy, but he has too many things to attend to already, even if he were capable of discharging such duties which the majority of Viceroys are not.<sup>1</sup>

The clash over the role of the Military Member was simply the focal point of an inevitable collision between two domineering individuals whose orbits unfortunately intersected. The effect was to free Haig from Kitchener's interference in his domain. While Kitchener was distracted Haig built a system of cavalry management which suited his designs. When the conflict with Curzon was resolved in the summer of 1905, the system was complete. There was by that time little that Kitchener could do to alter it.

Kitchener's tolerance may also have stemmed from a conscious

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 23 March 1905.

effort to court Haig's support and influence. Haig's role in the affair was more than that of a loyal fellow soldier. He actively campaigned on Kitchener's behalf among his influential friends at home. This is apparently exactly what Kitchener wanted, as indicated from the letter below:

I was astonished at K's concentration: He could think and talk to me of little else, and one afternoon spent over two hours explaining the whole case and reading me the choice passages from his despatches on the subject so that I might be quite au fait when I get home and able to give his case without difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

It is not clear how much Haig influenced the final outcome. It is known that he went on leave soon after the above was written. While in England he spent considerable time with the King. The King in turn played a significant part in the final outcome--which was favourable to Kitchener.

The relationship between Haig and Kitchener in India was therefore a symbiotic one. They were as a result on the most amicable terms with each other as they were at any time between the Sudan Campaign and 1916. The disputes of the past--which would rage again in the future--were temporarily put aside. Haig was full of praise for his chief. When he first arrived in India, he commented that 'already K has done a vast amount of good'.<sup>2</sup> Later, he described him as 'far-seeing',<sup>3</sup> a compliment which would not have been given in South Africa or in the Sudan. Kitchener, in turn, supported Haig wholeheartedly. He pushed Haig's appointment to Major General past a balking military establishment. This harmonious relationship is only partially explained by the give and

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 23 March 1905.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 5 November 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 23 March 1905.



take over the Curzon and cavalry issues. The two soldiers had a vast amount of mutual respect. Though they differed on important issues, they admired each other's honesty, integrity and devotion to duty. This respect and admiration could only surface in peacetime. In war, their differences--on subjects like staff appointments, cavalry tactics, offensive strategy, etc.--came to the fore and caused discord.

The high degree of order and efficiency which characterised Haig's approach to his profession was maintained in India. This approach cannot be explained as simply a manifestation of the affinity for these qualities within the military. With Haig the reasons went deeper. He was consciously trying to improve the cavalry's image, in order to prepare it for what he correctly saw as a struggle for survival. To this end, he kept up an exhaustive schedule of inspections:

Lucknow: I came here on Sunday morning and leave again next Sunday evening for Fyzahabad. My Bde. Major and I have had a bungalow lent to us here and every arrangement made for our comfort . . . I spent Monday and Tuesday inspecting [the 5th Dragoon Guards] and yesterday and today with the 6th Cavalry. Tomorrow I have them both out bivouacking about 20 miles apart for reconnaissance and field service duties and return Saturday forenoon.<sup>1</sup>

At Fyzahabad, and subsequent stations, the routine would begin anew.

Haig aimed to make himself a familiar figure, a focal point for improvement. He understood that an exercise had a greater effect if the reaction of the Inspector was immediately apparent to all concerned.

Haig saw himself as more a teacher than a judge. 'Every day of inspection must be a day of training', he wrote. 'The troops should feel after the inspection not merely that their efficiency

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 19 November 1903.

has been tested but that they have learnt something.' He conducted exercises which aimed to 'stimulate the intelligence of the men'.<sup>1</sup>

When appraising performance, he claimed that he was

. . . most considerate as it is better to carry people with one, than to stifle keenness by mere criticisms, without explaining what improvements and in what direction changes are required.<sup>2</sup>

This approach had, he believed, a positive effect:

I am beginning to see some small results of my work during the last two years, and in most places where I inspect I have a number of friends who are now very glad to welcome me whereas my predecessors were rather unwelcome guests and much feared and when I started I was greeted in the same style.<sup>3</sup>

Though this was a biased appraisal, there is no reason to doubt that Haig made an excellent Inspector General, despite the limitations of his tactical principles. He had mellowed somewhat since his days as an adjutant, when he was described as a martinet. He was an excellent administrator who had a high regard for the value of professional training. These were essential qualities for the job, and they ensured his success.

Another reason why Haig was successful was because he was so attentive to the image he presented. In the military, it is largely superficial qualities which inspire the ordinary soldier to admire and respect his commander. The soldier usually has no intimate knowledge of officers above the rank of captain. He appraises leadership abilities on the basis of how the individual looks or carries himself. Haig was acutely aware of this fact. While in South Africa, he wrote that 'I hear our staff is always considered

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations pertaining to Haig's approach to inspections are from his 'Notes on Inspections', contained in his 1903 diary.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 November 1903.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 January 1906.



well-dressed and clean: this has a good effect on all ranks.<sup>1</sup> Cleanliness suggested highly valued qualities such as honesty, integrity and courage. Slovenliness suggested unreliability. Thus, discipline and order among the ranks could be maintained by the leader who made it clear, through his appearance, that he would not tolerate any deviation from the accepted standards of conduct. The affinity for order and cleanliness which characterised Haig as a child was therefore reinforced through its usefulness as a technique of leadership.

Haig's preoccupation with his image had other manifestations. For instance, he was keenly aware of the importance of making a positive impression when he arrived at a station:

You would be surprised at the amount of baggage and stuff I have to go about with--horses and clerks and office boxes and orderlies. I am half ashamed at the number of bullock waggons required to convey all this stuff to and from the station: so l'arrivee is most impressive . . . especially for the regiment for they are not quite certain what to expect.<sup>2</sup>

At this stage, the active cultivation of his image was quite harmless. But whenever superficial characteristics are used to suggest leadership ability, there is scope for misconception. This possibility is especially dangerous during times of acute strife, such as war-time. At these times a question can arise regarding what is the man and what the image, and thus the distressing uncertainty of what will be revealed when the image breaks down.

Related to this problem of misconception is the dilemma surrounding the relationships between the leader and the various groups under his control. The military is built upon tiers of command: enlisted men, non-commissioned officers, officers, staff, etc. To

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 7 August 1900.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 26 November 1903.

each group, the leader must act differently. In other words, while Haig was able to inspire obedience and respect among the ordinary soldier by cultivating an image of the perfect cavalry officer, this tactic should not have been used with groups higher up. With the staff in particular, loyalty has to be based on an intimate knowledge of the leader. The staff must be allowed to see through the mask. Otherwise, their loyalty can become blind.

In order to function properly, the staff must be composed of men of high ability and intelligence who possess the courage to question and disagree with the commander. A premium must be placed on independence. It is up to the leader himself to make sure these requirements are satisfied. Few succeed. This failure to choose an independently minded staff is usually a result of character weaknesses on the part of the commander. It is easy to look to the staff as a convenient counterweight to criticism from outside and, therefore, to man it with officers whose obsequiousness can be assumed. Also, it is quite common for the commander to feel threatened by staff officers, since those officers are often the ones chosen to replace him in the event of failure. This causes the commander, consciously or subconsciously, to select men who are his intellectual inferiors, thus reducing the threat. Being surrounded by inferiors also boosts the ego of the commander and provides him with confirmation of his ability to lead. The quality of the staff is therefore often the best indicator of the commander's strength of character.

Haig was, in 1905, at a critical point with regard to his own staff policies. He recognised that modern war demanded a large, efficient staff. He was himself an excellent staff officer. But, during the Boer War and as Inspector General of Cavalry, he began for the first time to have a significant staff of his own. In choosing



officers, he displayed many of the weaknesses outlined above. This is reflected in a letter to Henrietta:

Alan Fletcher is to go to Cairo with the 17th before he comes out here. . . . I am sorry you don't think much of his brain power as you doubt whether he is 'clever enough for the job'. The so called sharp people very often disappoint us or cheat or have some other draw back such as being disagreeable, bad-tempered, etc. All I require is people of average intelligence who are keen to do their work properly. Alan is well up to this standard and is most unselfish and tactful, so that I find it a pleasure to go about with him.<sup>1</sup>

Fletcher became the model of the staff officer Haig would employ for the rest of his career. As will be discussed in the last chapter and the epilogue, the men who made up Haig's Great War staff--Launcelot Kiggell, John Davidson, and others--conformed to this model. Haig seems to have preferred blindly loyal, subservient staff officers to those capable of independent thoughts and actions. His main criterion when choosing a staff was to establish harmony. Honesty and integrity were therefore sacrificed in favour of smooth working conditions. As Haig saw it, the staff had to be a 'band of brothers'.<sup>2</sup> It is ironic that he could not tolerate men with the same abilities and characteristics which he had earlier displayed as a staff officer. The tragedy of this weakness was that it negated the positive aspects of his progressive staff principles. A blindly loyal staff, no matter how highly organised or efficient, can be as dangerous as no staff at all.

The routine of Haig's service in India was broken in the summer

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 September 1904.

<sup>2</sup>This was Haig's favourite expression with regard to the composition of the staff. It was used throughout his writings on staff policy up to and including the Great War. He defined the term not simply as a harmonious group, but as a loyal body ready to follow and defend the dictates of the commander against interference from outside. This is discussed at length in the epilogue. See also a memo in the 1910 diary in which he writes 'The General Staff . . . must be a band of brothers.'

of 1905 when he took leave in England. The visit was similar to a much-delayed 'coming out.' The social columnists welcomed the new entrant in the social round:

A Fortunate Officer--

General Douglas Haig . . . is one of the most fortunate of the younger officers of the British Army. He is only forty-four years of age, and has seen plenty of active service. . . . General Haig, who is a very soldierly looking fellow, and almost rivals General Baden Powell as a cavalry expert, was in the famous battles of the Atbara and at Khartoum, and subsequently achieved no small distinction in South Africa, where he was Deputy-Assistant-Adjutant-General of Cavalry. He was made a Major-General last year and few officers have such a promising future as he.<sup>1</sup>

The leave was full of engagements at the homes of influential friends and acquaintances. The level of activity was certainly a change from Haig's quieter habits of the past. The change was probably deliberate. Haig had reached a watershed in his career. As a young officer, he had been mainly interested in proving himself as a serious, determined professional. An active social life did not fit in with his designs. He could not risk appearing frivolous. By 1905, his reputation as a dedicated soldier was secure. An active social life then became possible, even advantageous. A familiar social profile was an asset to a major general in a way that it was not to a captain. Haig was expected to attend and to give parties. But the moderate approach which characterised him in the past was not discarded. He continued to choose those with whom he mixed with the utmost care. He worked hard to be on intimate terms with the Royal Family. His military friends were all of good background and traditional ideals. Politicians were avoided almost completely,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Newspaper clipping from unknown paper contained in Haig Papers, Acc. 3155, No. 41.

<sup>2</sup>The nearest Haig came to a friend from the political sector was Lord Esher, who, as would be expected, was without a political label.



though at the same time he managed to avoid making political enemies in either party.

It was in a similarly conscious way that Haig chose to marry during his leave. Previously, women had been a distraction, a danger or a bore. Suddenly, a wife became advantageous. A single gentleman of Haig's age and social standing was looked upon as either incomplete or somewhat curious. Once Haig opened his mind to marriage, he did not delay in finding an eligible partner to suit his requirements. A long, perhaps disastrous love affair simply did not fit in with his ambitious plans. He chose the Honourable Dorothy Maud Vivian, the first woman to whom he ever gave more than passing notice. A social columnist accurately described the courtship as 'A wooing not long a-doing':

Major-General Douglas Haig, who has recently been the hero of an engagement, other than a martial one, received with his bride, the Hon. Dorothy Vivian, the honour of being married in the private chapel of Buckingham Palace. A good deal of romance surrounds the betrothal, for it is said General Haig and Miss Vivian only met for the first time on Monday of Ascot Week, were engaged the following Saturday, and married within a fortnight.<sup>1</sup>

In actual fact, the couple formally met over golf on Thursday of Ascot Week. They spent the next day together at the races, and played golf in the evening. Haig proposed on the golf course on Saturday, despite being forced to pose the important question on his feet, due to the absence of a convenient bench near to the hole the two were playing. They were married on 11 July. When questioned about his lack of deliberation, Haig is said to have replied that he frequently spent far less time over more important decisions.

Despite the lack of deliberation, the marriage seems to have

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<sup>1</sup>Clipping from unknown newspaper, n.d., same source as previously cited.

been successful, at least by the standards of the day. If at first it could hardly have been a love match, it may have become one later. Far more important than emotions was the fact that Miss Vivian suited Haig's professional and social requirements. She was of good family, the daughter of the 4th Baron Vivian. She had long and secure connections with the Royal Family, having served as Queen Alexandra's lady-in-waiting. Most importantly, she was fully prepared to play the role of the dutiful, discreet and supportive military wife. As Charteris described:

Lady Haig fulfilled to perfection the difficult role that falls to the lot of the wife of a great man. She never interfered in official business, yet she was always there to help her husband. Her tact and intuition never failed. She was a discreet and sympathetic confidante and she strengthened his faith in his own power to overcome difficulties. She devoted every moment of her married life to her husband.

Charteris went on to claim that 'Marriage brought to Haig completeness.'<sup>1</sup> This is only partially true. In a social sense, his life became whole. But his marriage also caused a gap which would never be filled. The relationship with Henrietta, so important to Haig earlier in his career, was never the same after he married. His letters to her became less frequent and dealt with more mundane topics. Henrietta had been her brother's confidante and mentor. She had meddled enthusiastically in his life and career, and she had had, on the whole, a positive effect. Dorothy never completely filled Henrietta's role. She was less worldly-wise, scheming, self-confident and shrewd. Thus, while the marriage may have filled an emotional and social gap in Haig's life, professionally, it left him more alone.

After his marriage, Haig was not eager to return to India for the final year of his term. His reasons were professional rather

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 32.



than personal. The British Army was at this time entering a period of drastic reform. Haig wanted to make sure that the changes conformed to his wishes. He realised that he could not exert adequate influence while far away in India. He therefore tried, through his various connections, to land an appointment at the War Office. As indicated in the 6 August 1905 letter from French, these efforts failed:

You know we have been trying very hard to work you into that appointment, but now there is no doubt you will have to go back to India for a short time . . .

The King sent for me at Goodwood and asked me whether I thought there was any chance of you being appointed, so as to prevent your going to India. He was very keen about it and told me to make an appointment with Arnold-Forster and urge upon him the necessity for arranging the matter at once.

I saw A.F. on Friday . . . I feel quite certain A.F. thinks that the King is trying to push you into that appointment simply on personal grounds, and because you and your wife are particular friends of his. Like all political intriguers, he is always suspicious, and thinks people are acting as he would probably act in similar circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

The position to which French referred was the Director of Staff Duties. The incumbent was General Hutchinson, who still had time left on his term of office. Arnold-Forster, the Secretary of State for War, argued that Hutchinson had done nothing to warrant his replacement by Haig. On this occasion, the King's influence had ironically hindered Haig from landing a position to which, as was later proved, he was well-suited.

After he returned to India, Haig continued to focus his attention on a position at the War Office. Though he claimed that he was willing to stay in the country until the end of his term, in truth he was burning to get back to Britain as early as possible.

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<sup>1</sup>French to Haig, 6 August 1905, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).

This does not contradict his usual devotion to duty. Haig believed that he had special talents which were greatly in need at this critical time. His duty, as he saw it, lay in England. His friends at home had the same views, as indicated by the 26 November 1905 letter from Esher to Kitchener:

I am confident that you would do well to install Douglas Haig in the W.O. in London, for a couple of years. He would be the most valuable link which could be formed between you and the government at home. . . . I know that you would be sorry to lose him in India, but I feel certain that for your own purposes he would be more valuable in London.<sup>1</sup>

A short time later, Haig described in a letter to Henrietta how Esher had actively lobbied the new Secretary of State, Richard Burdon Haldane:

I received a letter from Esher this morning cracking up Haldane the new S. of S. for War like anything. Then towards the end of the letter he writes: 'There is only one change, not yet made, which Haldane must make. It is to put you in Hutchinson's place. I have never let him alone for a day since he took office on this subject.'

'If you get back here in that place for two years--the whole tone of Army officers and their Education will have undergone a change, which will recast the Army.'

I merely copy the latter para. to please you, as you like hearing me buttered up--and send you the first para. to show that my friends at home are still anxious to get me at the W.O.<sup>2</sup>

Though Haig claimed that 'personally I am quite happy in India',<sup>3</sup> in truth he believed that every day he spent there increased the risk of an Army which did not suit his designs. His letters were dominated by the subject of Army reform and his future role in it. He finally left India on 12 May 1906, five months prior to his end of term.

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<sup>1</sup>Esher to Kitchener, 26 November 1905, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/33/AA3.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 January 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



While a modern, efficient Army structure dominated Haig's mind before he managed to leave India, the tactical lessons he stressed there remained decidedly antequated. The best examples of this tendency are found in the staff tours which he organised. It will be remembered that Barrow once commented that one could always tell upon seeing Haig's plan for a ride which text he had last read. In India, every tour was based on a cavalry action of the all-too-distant past, culled from Haig's out-of-date cavalry manuals.<sup>1</sup> There was no attempt to hypothesise on the nature of possible future cavalry actions, and organise tours accordingly. Thus there is again the duality in Haig's make-up: the tours were modern phenomena used to advance obsolete principles. Three particular rides illustrate Haig's approach. The first was held at Aurangabad. Haig described the focus of the exercise as follows:

A 'Decisive Battle' the real object in War--Strategical Preparation--Selection of a 'Primary' and a 'Secondary' Theatre of War, and Use of Entrenched Depots, illustrated by 1809. --Measures to be taken with regard to a 'Buffer State'--Employment of the Cavalry Divisions and of the Army Cavalry up to the 'Decisive Battle'.

A second tour took place at Medak, and was similarly oriented:

The Operations of a Containing Force in a 'Secondary' Theatre of War-- Notes on Prince Eugene's Campaign in Italy, 1809.

The same reliance on the past can be seen in the third battle:

The Strategical Employment of Cavalry covering the Concentration of the Main Army to one Flank--Notes on the Ulm Campaign, 1805.<sup>2</sup>

The principles demonstrated by these rides were not all obsolete, though many definitely were. But by relying exclusively on pre-1870 examples in all of the tours, Haig displayed what seems an

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<sup>1</sup>See the 1905 diary for a list of Haig's favourite cavalry texts, the majority of which were published before the Franco-Prussian War.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Haig, Cavalry Studies, (London: Hugh Rees, 1907), p. viii, is the source for all three descriptions.

intentional disregard for the technological revolution in warfare which had been underway for some time.

The tours listed above were described, along with two others, in Cavalry Studies, which Haig published in 1907 with the help of Lonsdale Hale. The book is mostly too technical for this study. Its Introduction does, however, provide a valuable synopsis of Haig's cavalry theories, and of his aims in the book. In the opening pages, he clearly stated his thesis. War, he argued, was growing larger and more technical. This meant that cavalry's role would change in a similar fashion. The best way to understand this change was through staff rides. This is what Haig attempted to accomplish in India. His book was a compilation of his findings from these tours.

Haig claimed that the Indian tours demonstrated three future formations for cavalry. The first was Independent Cavalry, composed of small groups of horseman, and designed mainly for reconnaissance. The second was Protective Cavalry; these were medium-sized units designed as a first line of security for the army behind it. These two formations were not new. They covered the duties which cavalry had fulfilled throughout its history. The third formation, Divisional Cavalry, was a unique concept, at least in Britain. The British Cavalry had never been organised on a scale larger than brigades. The Divisional formation was to comprise three brigades, which would in turn be structured according to standard patterns. This formation was designed for bold offence. It will be remembered that after Kimberley Haig had advised Hale that the British Cavalry should be expanded to 'at least two Divisions complete'. This meant that its size would be more than doubled. Haig justified this increase by arguing that 'The war of masses necessitates mass tactics.' The



organisation and training of cavalry had to adjust to this fact.

To do otherwise would be 'vain, uncertain and harmful'.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the continued insistence upon cavalry's ability for bold offence, there was nothing unreasonable in Haig's arguments up to this point. He recognised that cavalry had two basic roles, the 'Service of Information'--or to 'discover', and the 'Service of Security'--or to 'cover'.<sup>2</sup> These duties remained relevant and important. Haig was also correct when he argued, a few paragraphs later, that able leadership was decisive in cavalry actions. Since speed and mobility were essential in cavalry operations, the officer had to be able to make rapid decisions and maintain order under extreme circumstances. Time and technology had not measurably changed this fact either. Nor was Haig wrong when he quoted G. F. R. Henderson on the overall importance of cavalry:

Infantry and Artillery . . . unaccompanied by Cavalry, if opposed by a force complete in all arms, are practically helpless, always liable to surprise, and, whether attacking or defending, hampered by ignorance of the enemy's movements and bewildered by uncertainty. . . . It is essential, then, for decisive success, that every force which takes the field against an organised enemy should be composed of the three arms.<sup>3</sup>

In 1907, when Cavalry Studies was published, the tank was simply a fantasy in the minds of quack scientists and eccentric novelists. The horse remained the only reliable source of mobility on the battlefield. Until a better source could be developed, the arm would remain essential, despite the whittling away of some of its functions by modern weaponry.

In trying to assess the future role of cavalry, Haig paved his

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, Cavalry Studies, p. 19. The emphasis is his.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

way with two basic assumptions. The first was that the cavalry was indispensable; the second that war was becoming larger in scope. From these correct assumptions, he concluded that the role of cavalry would increase, that 'large armies entail large numbers of cavalry'.<sup>1</sup> It was here that his reasoning began to falter. He was for some reason unable to understand that though time had not altered cavalry's indispensability, it had drastically changed the arm's nature and duties. In other words, Haig embraced the future by, as usual, taking refuge in the past. In so doing he ignored the important technological developments which had occurred during the course of his career. It did not require extraordinary insight to see that the rifle and the machine gun had revolutionised warfare. War had become not only larger, but also more deadly, more technical and more impersonal. By ignoring all but the first change, Haig drew a curtain over his understanding of modern tactics.

Evidence of these limitations in his ability to understand the technological revolution in warfare can be found toward the end of the introduction to Cavalry Studies. In rebutting the allegation that the 'day of the cavalry is past', Haig argued as follows:

The role of the Cavalry on the battlefield will always go on increasing because--

- 1) The extended nature of the modern battlefield means that there will be a greater choice of cover to favour the concealed approach of Cavalry.
- 2) The increased range and killing power of modern guns, and the greater length of time during which battles will last, will augment the moral exhaustion, will affect men's nerves more, and produce greater demoralisation amongst the troops. These factors contribute to promote panic and to render troops (short-service soldiers nowadays) ripe for attack by Cavalry.
- 3) The longer the range and killing power of modern arms, the more important will rapidity of movement become, because it lessens the relative time of exposure to danger in favour

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, Cavalry Studies, p. 4.



of the Cavalry.

4) The introduction of the small bore rifle, the bullet from which has little stopping power against the horse.<sup>1</sup>

Haig went on to reiterate cavalry's importance as a moral weapon.

He claimed that the arm would continue to play a part in every

phase of the battle--'in the prologue, the principal act and

the denouement'.<sup>2</sup> Finally, he re-stated his belief in the continued

viability of the charge, the arme blanche and the cavalry spirit.

'All great successes', he wrote, 'can only be gained by a force of

Cavalry which is trained to harden its heart and charge home.'<sup>3</sup>

The above four points have been used by Haig's critics as a noose by which to hang him for the carnage of the Great War. Haig's proponents have either ignored Cavalry Studies or stumbled badly in their explanation of it. Yet both groups have missed the real significance of the book. There is no direct correlation between it and the tactics employed by Haig in the Great War. Haig did not send cavalrymen to a horrible death on the Western Front because he had little faith in the killing power of modern rifles. He did not even pursue what could be seen as a cavalry-oriented strategy. He did not do so because war had, while his back was turned, changed so radically that it did not offer him the opportunity to make these mistakes. The importance of the four points, and indeed of Cavalry Studies as a whole, is that they were the terminus of his tactical thinking. The belief that 'the role of the cavalry . . . will always go on increasing' implied a belief in the immutability of the type of battle which Haig first experienced at Elands-laagte. This was

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<sup>1</sup>Haig, Cavalry Studies, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

a battle in the tradition of the great military leaders whom Haig had studied throughout his career. But the machine gun, modern artillery, limited battlefields, huge citizen armies, barbed wire, gas, and other developments negated many of the sacred military truths which underlay this type of battle. Haig's stubborn insistence upon their continued relevance seriously hindered his absorption and understanding of the monumental changes in military science which were in progress. The era demanded an extraordinarily open mind, not one clouded by the tenets of Napoleon and Frederick the Great. While Haig had been by nature slow to accept change, his mind had been slammed shut at Kimberley. Only a dreadful, new type of war could slowly wrench it open.



## CHAPTER VIII

Haig at the War Office, 1906-1909

The Boer War taught Britain two main lessons. The first was that her isolation was neither splendid nor safe. The second was that her army was a disorganised, inefficient and old-fashioned institution. It was hardly suited for its intended task of defending the Empire and was certainly no match for the large conscript armies on the continent. Britain responded well to both of these lessons. There arose a feverish desire to bring both army and country into harmony with the twentieth century. In the diplomatic sphere, friendly overtures were made to France and Japan. In the military, there was widespread support for drastic reform. It was accepted that to implement this reform, men of intelligence and foresight--true military professionals--were desperately needed.

As was discussed earlier, the Boer War had two major effects upon Haig. The first was that it confirmed his belief in antiquated tactical principles. In tactical terms, therefore, he was not the man of foresight and wisdom which the country required. But he had always been a talented administrator. He recognised the need for widespread changes in the Army's organisational structure. The Boer War underlined this need. And because the war enabled Haig to be recognised as a promising young soldier (the second effect) he was able to put his administrative talents to good use. Timing was therefore crucial at this stage in Haig's career. At a time when the focus of reform was structural rather than tactical, Haig happened to be in a position to be recognised. The Boer War revealed the British Army as a sick institution and Haig as one of the few qualified doctors.

The basic administrative defect of the British Army revealed by the Boer War was the absence of a streamlined bureaucracy designed to handle all the exigencies of an army at war. The Army had, over



the centuries, evolved without a plan; there had never been a blueprint for its structure or wartime expansion. This meant that in war, the onus was on the chief commander to make operations run smoothly and successfully. If he failed or if the task grew too large for him, there were no reliable administrative institutions below or above him to compensate for his inadequacies. Such was the case in South Africa, where Sir Redvers Buller quickly proved himself incapable of handling the vast responsibilities of an army at war. When Roberts and Kitchener took over, matters improved, but the Army was nevertheless ill-equipped to expand to the size required to defeat the Boers.

It was clear that effective reform had to begin at the top. There was no point in changing specific institutions; the Army was defective throughout. Broad-scale changes were proposed as early as 1889-90 by the Hartington Commission. This body concluded that the office of Commander-in-Chief had to be replaced by an administrative organ--composed of men with separate, well-defined responsibilities--with a neatly subdivided bureaucracy below it. The problem with the office of Commander-in-Chief was that it wedded the administrative and the executive in a single man. The Commander-in-Chief was responsible for both the formulation and the implementation of Army policy. In neither responsibility was he aided by a coordinated group of able assistants. Such concentration is unthinkable in a modern, professional army. But widespread reform of the type required had two prerequisites. The first was the abolition of the post of Commander-in-Chief. As long as the office was held by the Duke of Cambridge--who occupied it for thirty-nine years--change was impossible. The Duke not only abhorred reform; he also retained, to the very end of his term, the power to block all reforming movements. He was perceptive

enough to realise that reform would have meant the end of the Army as he knew it (and therefore the end of his role in it) and selfish enough to place personal desires before the good of his country and army. When the Duke left office in 1896, the second prerequisite came into play. What then became necessary was a Secretary of State for War clever enough to sort out the vast bureaucratic morass and astute enough to overcome conservative obstructionism in Parliament and Army.

It was one thing to propose a new, efficient Army structure, and it was another to find men to staff it. The need for well-trained staff officers was another deficiency revealed by the Boer War. The organs for change in this area already existed. The Staff College had been founded over fifty years earlier. It had only to expand its output and improve its product. But this was not an easy task. It was made difficult by the widespread and persistent prejudices within the Army against the College, its graduates and the whole idea of professionalisation. These prejudices were discussed in Chapter IV. Though matters had improved, the College was to an extent stuck in its traditional vicious circle. It could not improve its product unless it consistently attracted promising officers. It could not attract these officers unless it could offer them prestigious staff appointments and accelerated promotion. It could not make this promise because among senior officers patronage and favouritism were still the rule. It could not change this attitude unless it offered a more attractive product. The only way to break this vicious circle was through a complete change of attitude at every level of the Army.

The inadequacies revealed by the Boer War were not confined to the administrative sphere. Britain required, at the peak of the war,



450,000 men to defeat the Boers. This virtually exhausted the available reserves and left the homeland essentially undefended. Since a European conflagration in which Britain would play a part looked more and more likely as the new century progressed, a dependable reserve army, capable of expansion upon mobilisation, became a priority. But it was infinitely more difficult to build such a force in Britain than it was in France or Germany, where million-man armies had existed for some time. With conscription and short-service, mass armies were automatic. In Britain, a force on the continental model was impossible for two reasons. One was the British reluctance in the early years of the century to spend more than £28 million per year on her Army. A second, more significant, reason was the traditional British abhorrence of the standing army. Lord Roberts' tireless efforts on behalf of a universal service bill before 1914 only demonstrated that conscription was impossible in peacetime. The size of the reserve force was therefore limited by the Government's willingness to pay for it and the population's willingness to volunteer for it.

All of these problems were highlighted by the possibility of a massive European war. The Anglo-French accord of 1904 and the continuing Anglo-German naval rivalry made British participation in such a conflict almost certain. Haig, for instance, looked upon the Germans as the enemy as early as 1898 when he was travelling down the Nile on the way to the Sudan.<sup>1</sup> Since Britain could not hope to match the military power of the German Army, the help of the Empire would be essential. This necessity gave rise to a whole new set of administrative problems, ranging from the need for similar weaponry to the necessity for pre-determined channels of command

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter V, page 148.

and standardised tactics and strategy. Uniformity was imperative. But uniformity required cooperation, and the institutions for fostering this cooperation did not exist.

The British military effort in South Africa was examined by one Select Committee and two Royal Commissions. All of the above-mentioned general reforms, in addition to a multitude of specific measures, were recognised as essential. The Select Committee, chaired by Clinton Dawkins, met while the war was still in progress. It outlined the need for a more decentralised military authority and better cooperation between the government and the military. The first Royal Commission, chaired by Lord Elgin, met in the autumn of 1902 and studied the conduct of the war. Few sectors of the Army escaped criticism. The Army was condemned for its lack of preparation, poor leadership, outdated equipment, faulty training and inadequate staff work. The leaders were especially blamed for failing to listen to the advice of their intelligence staffs, the latter being the only group to receive praise. Following the Elgin Report, a committee chaired by the Duke of Norfolk found similar faults in the command, training and supply of Britain's auxiliary forces--the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusions of these various studies could not be ignored by the government of A. J. Balfour. There was general agreement that drastic reforms were imperative. Balfour responded by setting up a three man committee, headed by Lord Esher, which was asked to make

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<sup>1</sup>The main source for this chapter is Edward Spiers' Haldane: An Army Reformer, (Edinburgh University Press, 1980). Other sources used are J. Gooch, The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy 1900-1916. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); Stephen Koss, Lord Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); A. J. Anthony-Morris, 'Haldane's Army Reforms 1906-08', History, Vol. 56 (February 1971); and B. Bond, 'Richard Burdon Haldane at the War Office', Army Quarterly, Vol. 86, (April-July 1963).



recommendations for specific changes.<sup>1</sup> Esher, who had a deep concern for the Army, plunged enthusiastically into this task. He produced three massive reports in four months. The main recommendation of the Esher Committee was the replacement of the Commander-in-Chief by an Army Council. The Council was to include four military heads of department (Chief of the General Staff, Adjutant General, Master General of Ordnance and Quartermaster General) and three civilians (the Secretary of State for War, Parliamentary Under Secretary and Financial Secretary). This was obviously the first requirement in any broad program of reform. In addition, the Esher Committee recommended the establishment of a General Staff on the German model, manned by well-trained professionals. The General Staff was to be not simply an administrative, but also a policy-forming body. Below the Army Council, each separate department would be divided into directorates, each with its own area of concern. For instance, underneath the CGS would be the Director of Military Training (DMT), the Director of Staff Duties (DSD) and the Director of Military Operations (DMO). The other three Military Members of Council would have their departments similarly subdivided. Finally, Esher recommended a clean sweep of top Army commanders--men who, he feared, would otherwise obstruct progress.

Esher's advice was both wise and workable. It proposed the neatly compartmentalised structure which was essential in both war and peace. It also separated the executive from the administrative, and removed the possibility of one man, the Commander-in-Chief, acting as a drag on progress. Balfour accepted Esher's recommendations. On 3 February 1904, the Army Council was set up and the post of

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<sup>1</sup>The other members of the Committee were Admiral Sir John Fisher and Sir George Clarke, previously Governor of Victoria.

Commander-in-Chief abolished. The Army Council was then supposed to implement the other changes propose by Esher. But progrees<sup>1</sup> ground to a halt. Balfour's Secretary of State for War, H. O. Arnold-Forster, was sincerely interested in reform, but did not possess the political muscle to push it through. He was further hampered by an Army Council whose first members were weak men ill-suited to the gigantic tasks which faced them. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Neville Lyttleton, was a dedicated soldier who unfortunately did not possess the energy, insight and imagination required at this critical time. Furthermore, Arnold-Forster faced stiff opposition from within his own party. His efforts at reform are a sad and complicated story of governmental muddle which it is not necessary to elucidate here. When the Conservatives were defeated in January 1906, few of the Esher recommendations, aside from the disappointing Army Council, had been implemented.

Haig first reacted to the prospect of reform with eagerness balanced by scepticism. He had complete confidence in Esher, but he was wary of any scheme in which politicians--whom he distrusted as a group<sup>1</sup>--were involved. His confidence was bolstered by an early letter from Esher inwhich the proposals of the committee were explained:

We meet everyday in the W.O. and have done a good deal of work at high pressure. The ideas are, to approach all reform from the point of view of War. This is a novelty in War Office procedure. We want to make it an organisation for War, adaptable to Peace. Hitherto, the position has been very different, as you well know.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig's doubts about the possibility of politicians effecting military reform can be seen in a 25 October 1901 letter to Brinsley Fitzgerald: 'The Army still seems as far off being "reformed" as ever: these politicians talk too much and . . . "deeds not words" is what is wanted.' Fitzgerald Papers, PP/MCR/118/1/1.

<sup>2</sup>Esher to Haig, 12 January 1904, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).



These ideals were similar to Haig's own. Preparation for war, and the acceptance of the Army as an institution designed to fight wars, were at the heart of Haig's military doctrine. The Army, he believed should never be embarrassed by its aggressive potential, but should develop, even flaunt, it. This is what he had stressed in his exercises, training programs and staff tours since his early days as an adjutant.

In the same letter mentioned above, Esher explained the Army Council scheme and the other proposals contained in the committee's reports. He confided that when the recommendations were implemented, 'we hope to sweep out the old lot and put in new men'. Haig agreed with this policy. He was eager to see the Army's vast collection of dead wood--men who caused him such grief in South Africa--reduced. He was especially delighted that Esher had him in mind as one of the new men:

I wish to goodness we could get you as QMG . . . but it would be a crime to take you away from what you are doing, and put you at a desk.

Still, of thoughtful, broad-minded soldiers there is a singular dearth. Perhaps you have no conception how barren is the land here! And without good men, the machine--however you construct it--is bound to creak. I believe that you, more than any, have thought out problems. If ever you falsify the hopes you have raised in all those who care for the Army, woe betide you!<sup>1</sup>

Haig had the same confidence in his own potential, the same lack of faith in the majority of the Army's senior officers. It was, however, unrealistic of Esher to see Haig as a possible QMG. Whatever his talents, he was, at the age of forty-two, far too young for so senior a post.

The Esher letter started Haig on a period of intense speculation regarding the reform of the Army and his role in it. He at first had

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<sup>1</sup>Esher to Haig, 12 January 1904.

high hopes that Esher's plans would result in positive change. For instance, he cautioned Henrietta not to be dismayed by the initial turmoil which had resulted:

Of course there must be some confusion in the War Office at home after such a thorough shaking up, but I doubt whether it is right to call it 'chaos'. Throw into a tank a number of bodies of various sizes and weights, and you have the present state of affairs. There is bound to be a 'settling down' and a rearrangement of bodies which have got into unsuitable places. But I feel sure that the system of Army Control which has been started is a sound one.<sup>1</sup>

After his summer leave in 1905, this attitude changed. Haig began to lose faith in Arnold Forster's ability to implement the Esher proposals. His dismay was aggravated by the failure of Esher, French and the King to secure him a post at the War Office. A note of bitterness crept into his letters:

I have heard nothing at all about getting a place on the Army Council and at present I don't think a sedentary life would altogether suit me.<sup>2</sup>

This appears to have been sour grapes, as evidenced by his claim a few weeks later that 'I don't much care whether I go to the War Office or not at present.'<sup>3</sup> Haig probably remained as interested as ever, though he protected himself against disappointment in case his willingness to assist in the reforms was ignored. He may also have been trying to distance himself, consciously or subconsciously, from a scheme which seemed destined to fail.

The failure of Arnold Forster demonstrated the earlier stated second prerequisite for broad-scale change: a man with the political expertise to steer a new system past the conservative obstruction in Parliament and the Army. It is ironic that the man who finally

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 1 September 1905.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 25 October 1905.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 13 December 1905.



succeeded, Richard Burdon Haldane, was a member of the traditionally pacific Liberal Party who had little experience in military matters and who did not even want to be Secretary of State for War. Haldane at first had no intention of serving in a cabinet headed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. When a deal was made which paved the way for his serving, Haldane at first set his sights on the Home Office, but was disappointed. He reluctantly accepted the War Office, but, having done so, devoted himself to it entirely.

Haldane was perhaps Britain's greatest Secretary of State for War. Nevertheless, this possibility should not be allowed to cloud the realities and limitations of his administration. He was, quite possibly, his own greatest admirer. Because of the post-1918 efforts to find a scapegoat for the British failures in the Great War, he had a special need for self-glorification. As Spiers points out, the autobiographies which Haldane published after the war are of questionable historical value because he was

. . . an author intent on self-justification. Haldane had incurred more than criticism of his reforms; he had become the object of a sustained personal attack in the popular press. He had chosen, ultimately, to reply in a highly personalised and polemical fashion. He had proved himself as able as ever in marshalling evidence and in constructing a lucid account. Yet his method of presentation and the context in which the work was produced must raise doubts about its value as historical evidence. The possibility of bias, or over-simplification, whether intentional or otherwise, cannot be excluded.<sup>1</sup>

The autobiographies reveal the legal skills of their author. The arguments are so convincing that a number of historians have been fooled. Stephen Koss, for instance, has reacted to Haldane's persuasiveness and his ill-treatment after the war by giving him too

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<sup>1</sup>Spiers, Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 27. The autobiographies referred to are Before the War, (London: Cassell and Company, 1927) and Autobiography (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929). The former contains the most information on the period of Army reform.

much praise and credit for the military reforms insituted during his term at the War Office.<sup>1</sup>

It must be emphasised that Haldane did not originally intend to prepare Britain for war, despite his post-war claims to the contrary:

I became aware at once that there was a new army problem. It was, how to mobilise and concentrate at a place of assembly to be opposite the Belgian frontier, a force calculated as adequate . . . to make up for the inadequacies of the French armies for their great task of defending the entire French frontier.<sup>2</sup>

Haig is also guilty of encouraging this misconception. After the war, he dedicated a volume of his despatches to Haldane, 'in grateful remembrance of his successful efforts in organising the Military Forces for a War on the Continent.'<sup>3</sup> Though this may have been the effect of Haldane's efforts, it was not their intent.

The intent was to make the Army as efficient and professional as possible within the strict limits of a low budget and a national abhorrence of compulsory service. These restrictions, not the requirements of a continental strategy (as Haldane later claimed), were the guidelines for reform. Spiers calls Haldane's post-war claims 'utter fabrications':

. . . the paucity of the British Expeditionary Force was not an example of prescient thought about troop dispositions on the Western Front. The size of that force did not relate to a strategy, Continental or otherwise . . . Any speculation about the strategic role or the military capability of the Force was merely an attempt to rationalize a body, earmarked for war, whose size was determined by the exigencies of peacetime criteria.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Koss, Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism.

<sup>2</sup>Haldane, Before the War, pp. 30-31.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Spiers, Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 192.



Haldane reformed the Army according to his own pragmatic appreciation of the possibilities. This reformed Army then prepared for war. The distinction is subtle, but important. Had Haldane intended to prepare for a continental war, he would have pushed for larger Army estimates and a compulsory service law. He would have paid closer attention to strategy and tactics, areas which, as will be seen, he virtually ignored. Had he pursued these wider goals, he most likely would have failed. He achieved the maximum possible. His reform program was a political solution to a military problem. As such, it was incomplete.

It must also be emphasised that Haldane was not the author of the reforms credited to him. Most were those which Esher had proposed earlier. Some originated with the Hartington Commission. In other words, when Haldane arrived at the War Office, the framework for reform had already been decided for him. His problem was not to create but to implement--to fit the predetermined changes into the political, social, and military context. This is where his predecessors had failed.

Haldane also benefited from a number of advantages which his predecessors did not have. Aside from his greater talents as a politician, he was aided by a large Liberal majority which provided him with five peaceful years in which to work. The fervour for drastic and immediate reform which put excessive pressure on Arnold-Forster had also abated somewhat by 1906. This gave Haldane an environment which facilitated a slow and smooth transformation. His lack of experience turned out to be an advantage as he could approach the problems with a completely open mind. He had the time, the patience and the will to make great progress. In his words, he came to the War Office:

. . . as a young and blushing virgin just united to a bronzed warrior, and . . . it was not expected by the public that any result of the union would appear until at least nine months had passed.<sup>1</sup>

He used the time to good effect. His greatest asset was perhaps his willingness to listen to the 'bronzed warriors'. His mind was open enough to recognise sound advice when it was proffered. The advice he received, from Haig and others, was central to his eventual success.

When Haldane took office, Haig's previous pessimism was replaced by cautious optimism. 'Haldane cannot be worse than Arnold-Forster and he must have some pluck to take over the post of Secretary of War',<sup>2</sup> Haig wrote on 13 December 1905. A while later Esher wrote that he had complete faith in Haldane and that he 'had never let him alone for a day',<sup>3</sup> on the subject of a War Office appointment for Haig. At the same time that Esher was persuading Haldane, French was putting pressure on the King. Haig's enthusiasm for reform consequently returned. He became confident that Haldane would succeed, a confidence that was bolstered by a reasonable certainty that he would be around to assist:

I had a long letter from French by last mail dated 14th January in which he writes 'I think there is every chance of the billet about which we talked being vacant within the next 6 or 8 months, and then there is no doubt about your being called upon to fill it.' . . . 'You may hope to be installed in Pall Mall by next autumn.'

This, I think, will be a very good arrangement for Doris and me . . .

Every one I hear from in the soldiering line at home, speaks well of Haldane, so the advent of the radicals is certainly of great advantage to the Army, in substituting him for Arnold-Forster. French seems to like him very much;

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 13 December 1905.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 11 January 1906. (Quoted in Chapter VII, p. 262).



and the 'Army Councillors', Hubert Hamilton writes me, 'have now the spirits of schoolboys home for their holidays.' So for now at any rate things seem to be going well for the Army.<sup>1</sup>

French was referring to the Directorate of Staff Duties, the post he tried to secure for Haig in the summer of 1905. The incumbent, H. D. Hutchinson, was due to leave the Directorate in October, at which time Haig could take his place.

Haldane suddenly changed these plans. He appointed Haig to the Directorate of Military Training, with the understanding that he would remain there for about a year and then be moved to the DSD. Haldane planned in this way to apply Haig's administrative expertise to a wide variety of areas. Once he had completed all that he could do in one directorate, he would be moved to the other. Haig was pleased with the idea, as evidenced by his 28 March letter to his sister:

About a week ago I got two letters from Esher and one from General Lyttleton offering me the Directorate of Training. The former said Mr. Haldane was very anxious for me to come home and assist in the schemes of reorganisation, and both he and the King were desirous that I should accept the billet. Altho' called 'Training' the department also deals with 'War Organisation' and 'Home Defence' so that now it is the most important Directorate in the General Staff at the present time.<sup>2</sup>

A few days later he wrote:

. . . it is a very great honour to be sent for at this critical time to help to decide the future organisation of the Empire's forces. So I ought to be thought very lucky.<sup>3</sup>

After a few minor complications regarding his date of appointment and his salary, Haig finally left India and arrived in London on 1 June 1906.

Haig was lucky. The timing of his long-awaited appointment was

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 8 February 1906.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 29 March 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Henrietta, 3 April 1906.

crucial. Had he been appointed DSD in 1905, his role in the Army reform, and his subsequent career, would have been very different. He would then have been tainted by the failures of Arnold-Forster. Haldane was eager to make a fresh start in terms of the men who advised him. When he came to the War Office, he replaced many officers, such as Herbert Plumer, whose minds were clouded by the ideas and ways of his predecessor. He might therefore have rid himself of Haig. Or, if Haig had been allowed to stay, it is unlikely that Haldane would have relied upon him to the extent which he eventually did. Timing was important in other respects. By arriving in June, Haig came to the War Office six months after Haldane. The initial turmoil had by that time abated. Haldane was clear about what he wanted to do and what he wanted from Haig. When Haig arrived his duties were therefore clear. He could set to work with a minimum of preliminary orientation. Also, by the time Haig arrived, Haldane--due to the fulsome praise of Esher and French--had such a high opinion of Haig that he was prepared to give him maximum responsibility. For Haig, DMT was hardly more than a title. His responsibilities went far beyond the formal duties of that office or, later, of the DSD. His real role was to act as trusted advisor to Haldane whenever, and in whatever capacity, required. As a result, he played a major part in every aspect of the Haldane reform program.

Bolstered by the praise of French and Esher, and his own high opinion of himself, Haig returned to Britain confident that he was to play a major role in the Army's and the country's future. The ambitions of his youth were being gloriously fulfilled. His belief in his illustrious destiny was further reinforced by a visit to a spiritualist a few months after his return. As evidenced by the following uncharacteristically lengthy diary entry, Haig was impressed by



the medium's information:

At 3 p.m. went with Henrietta to see a medium, Miss McCreddie . . . She first gave her opinion on a letter re Bee's business--next secured a letter from me from Col. Ellison--she noticed my influence on the latter. I had come recently from abroad and was now settling down. Seemed to be drawing a great force around me which would be of assistance in the new Scheme. Ellison is most trustworthy fellow but lacked self-confidence. She thought a 'company basis' better than a 'battalion basis' for expansion of Territorial Army. Then I gave her a letter from Mr. Haldane (the S. of S.). She said he was a 'very clever man'. Honest and far-seeing and would fight to bring people round to his opinions. Asked by Henrietta about me (before she went under control) she said she felt I wanted magnetism and had been unwell but was getting better. It seemed as if I would go abroad after a time for some special object of a wide and important nature. Much would depend on me. Then when under control by a little native girl 'Sunshine' she said that I was influenced by several spirits: notably a small man named Napoleon aided me. That it was in my power to be helped by him for good affairs but I might repel him if his influence was for bad, tho' he had become changed for better in the spirit world. I was destined to do much good and to benefit my country. Asked by me how to ensure the Territorial Army Scheme being a success, she said thought governed the world. Think out the scheme thoroughly, one's thoughts would then be put in so convincing a manner that the people would respond (without any compulsion) and the National Army would be a reality. She could not bring Napoleon to me when I wanted but I must think of him and try and get his aid as he was always near me. My mother too was close to me and a sister . . . My mother threw a light around me and Henrietta and placed on my breast a star which illuminated all about me.

Hugo also sent me a message. So did George, but latter feeble.<sup>1</sup>

Dixon argues that an interest in spiritualism and the supernatural is an authoritarian trait.<sup>2</sup> This may be true, but the connection should not be laboured. The attraction to seances was in common with the rest of Haig's family and his class.<sup>3</sup> Superstitious beliefs were a sign of the time, not necessarily evidence of an authoritarian

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 20 September 1906.

<sup>2</sup>Dixon, Military Incompetence, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup>Rachel Haig often mentioned seances which she had attended in her letters to Douglas while he was in school. During the Great War, Haig received regular letters from his sister Janet which were purportedly written under the spirit influence of their deceased brother George. See Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 347/25.



temperament.<sup>1</sup>

Haig nevertheless did believe sincerely in the ability of some mediums to communicate with the spirit world. His visits to spiritualists were so frequent that they cannot be explained as mere curiosity. His sincerity is also demonstrated by the fact that he was discriminating. He recognised that not all mediums were legitimate. On one occasion he described a certain spiritualist as 'a great fraud'.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Miss McCreadie above, were trusted implicitly. He was impressed when, on another visit, the spirit of Hector MacDonald was raised and 'a guitar was played in mid-air'.<sup>3</sup> But the sessions which had the most profound effect upon him were undoubtedly those in which he was given a glimpse of his own future. He was probably attracted to these because in all cases they confirmed his belief in a glorious destiny. A sceptic would argue that the medium was simply an astute judge of character who read the newspapers, had a good memory and had the insight to tell her subject exactly what he wanted to hear.

There was, however, one particularly noteworthy communication with the spirit world which did not take the above-mentioned narcissistic form. On 3 February 1907, Haig wrote that he

Received curious communication from Henrietta that Germans intend to invade England and that letters pretending to be in English but really emanating from Berlin will appear in the Press, accusing Haldane of aiming at conscription. The object of them, to prevent England from having a National Army.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The popularity of seances is discussed in C. Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), pp. 90-95.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 24 November 1908.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 9 November 1907. MacDonald was the hero of Omdurman who shot himself in a Paris hotel in 1903 rather than face trial for alleged sexual relations with a young native boy in Ceylon.

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 3 November 1907.



Henrietta, perhaps because she had a greater quantity of idle time, was even more of an enthusiast for seances than her brother. This interest, combined with a continued concern for his future and career, often resulted in curious correspondence such as the above. Haig felt that the information in this case was important enough to pass on to Haldane. The latter, betraying his rationalism, 'thought it most interesting, but not from the spirit world'.<sup>1</sup>

The difference of opinion with regard to the spirit world was one of many areas in which Haig and Haldane diverged. Their personalities could hardly have been more different. They nevertheless got on splendidly. This was no doubt because they had similar goals with regard to reform of the Army and realised the assistance each could give to the other. Shortly after taking office, Haldane told the House of Commons that

The men one comes across, the new school of young officers, entitled to the appellation of men of science just as much as engineers or chemists, were to me a revelation; and the whole question of the organisation of the Army is fraught with an interest which, I think, is not behind that of the study of any other scientific problem. A new school of officers has arisen since the South African War, a thinking school of officers who desire to see the full efficiency from new organisation and no surplus energy running to waste.<sup>2</sup>

Terraine uses the above as proof of Haldane's high opinion of Haig.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the statement was made prior to Haig's return from India, before Haldane met him. But Haig did fit the description of the 'new school of young officers'. Once Haldane met Haig, he realised this. 'When he arrived in London', Haldane later wrote of Haig, 'he grasped the situation completely and gave invaluable advice'.<sup>4</sup> Haldane was

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 4 February 1907.

<sup>2</sup>Parliamentary Debates, 8 March 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Haldane, Autobiography, p. 199.

an astute judge of character. His praise of Haig should be taken at face value. Haldane felt that Haig possessed a 'first-rate General Staff mind'.<sup>1</sup> When it is borne in mind that the British conception of the General Staff was traditionally that of an administrative rather than a technically creative body, this seems an accurate appraisal.

Haig, in turn, was immediately impressed with Haldane. He soon found that Haldane conflicted with his preconceptions regarding politicians. Haldane, Haig wrote after their first meeting, 'is a big fat man with a kind, genial face. One seemed to like the man at once.'<sup>2</sup> The next day he described the Secretary of State for War as 'a most clear-headed and practical man. Most ready to listen and weigh carefully all that is said to him.'<sup>3</sup> Haig's attitude toward politicians was built upon ignorance. They were a group with which he seldom associated. Ignorance gave rise to distrust, disrespect and even fear. His experience with Haldane, though entirely positive, did nothing to change this attitude. The prejudices remained and would become even more bitter during the Great War.

After he left Haldane's service, Haig wrote the following to a fellow officer:

It is a good thing to see the inside of the War Office for a short time, as it prevents one from having any respect for an official letter . . .<sup>4</sup>

This was just professional snobbery. What Haig should have learned at the War Office was that there was little difference between soldier's and politicians--at least as far as their methods were concerned. Haig

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<sup>1</sup>Haldane, Autobiography, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 9 June 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 10 June 1906.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, p. 76.



need only have looked at himself for proof of this point. For instance, he was impressed with tricks of Haldane's such as the following:

Attend lecture at 3 P.M. in RUSI on Swiss military system. Mr. Haldane in chair. A very crowded meeting, many no doubt hoping to have a go at H. after the lecture. But he found it necessary to attend to business, so left before discussion began!--a wise proceeding.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Haig above such tactics. He was adept at courting favour and at sidestepping opposition. He could easily sanction devious practices if he felt they were for the good of the Empire. He possessed these attributes before he entered the War Office, but refined them during his time there. For instance, there is evidence of a mild conspiracy between Haldane and Haig, behind the back of Sir William Nicholson, in the following entry:

About 5 o'clock CGS sent for S. of S. then I was sent for and Kiggell.

S. of S. explained to me his views as if I was in complete ignorance. Kiggell nearly gave the show away by turning to me and stating that he believed 'those were my views etc.'<sup>2</sup>

When Haig left the War Office, he made sure that his policies would survive by cleverly installing the rather malleable Sir Launcelot Kiggell in the DSD and then directing him accordingly from India. While Haig could excuse these practices by seeing them as part of a righteous purpose, this made them no less devious--or 'political'.

With the background of the Haig-Haldane relationship now complete, the focus can be shifted to the content of the reforms they effected. Soon after the election in January 1906, Haldane went on a short retreat in Scotland with his Military Secretary, Colonel Gerald Ellison. There they found the atmosphere and privacy conducive to a detailed

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 12 January 1907. RUSI is the Royal United Services Institute.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 4 November 1907.

contemplation of military problems. When they returned to London in late January, they were ready to lend substance to the Esher framework for reform. The reform programme can be broken down into three general areas. The first centred on the restructuring of Army commands, the creation of a reserve army, and the formation of the British Expeditionary Force. The second area involved the development of a General Staff, the third of an Imperial General Staff. Of these three areas, the most important and the most difficult was the first. The formation of an easily mobilised force was Haldane's most significant test of political acumen. The Esher report provided few guidelines. Though Ellison had previously studied the problem,<sup>1</sup> Haldane was otherwise virtually on his own. His predecessors had stumbled in this area and, as a result, proceeded no further. If Haldane could succeed, he would gain the necessary momentum to bring about the required broad-ranging reforms.

In forming a reserve army, Haldane benefitted considerably from the failures of his predecessors. Both Arnold-Forster and W. St. John Brodrick had tried to create a reserve by altering the terms of service of the regular Army. In other words, by juggling the time spent with the colours and reserves, these men hoped to build the necessary back-up force of the required size. This practice was similar to that of the Continental Armies, but did not have the essential component--compulsion--which alone ensured success. In Britain, under such a system, the size of the reserve would necessarily be limited by the number of men willing to volunteer for an extended term in the Army. They had essentially to make the Army their career.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1898, the then Captain Ellison published Home Defence (London: Edward Stanford, 1898), in which he discussed the possibility of raising a reserve force from the raw material of the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers, the policy which was eventually adopted by Haldane.



The number of men willing to do this had always been very small.

A reserve force, no matter how the terms of service were played with, could not, therefore, grow to an adequate size. The solution, as Haldane saw it, was to tap a different source of manpower: men who, though unwilling to make the Army a career, would agree to being part-time soldiers. This source already existed. The auxiliary forces--Militia, Volunteers and Yeomanry--were composed of civilians willing to serve their country--if only on a part-time basis.

The best idea, therefore, seemed to be to convert the old three-tiered system of Regulars, Militia and Auxiliaries into a two-tiered one of Regulars and Territorials.<sup>1</sup> But, while the auxiliaries constituted a ready source of manpower, they were by no means a dependable one. Haldane's task was not simply one of unifying the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers and changing their name to the Territorial Army. The Auxiliaries were incompetently led, improperly trained, inadequately supplied and hopelessly disorganised. They were neither intended nor prepared for service overseas as a reserve army. Their supply of men was prey to the whims of national conscience. Each of the auxiliary units was raised on a local level. Their standards thus varied accordingly. From this raw material Haldane had to create a force which could be mobilised at the outbreak of war and, after a short period of preparation, be ready to fight. It had to be a force capable of rapid expansion in wartime. Uniformity--of training, supply, command and organisation--was the key requirement.

The Auxiliary forces had, therefore, to undergo a drastic transformation. They had to become a military force complete in all arms and services. The process of transformation entailed a complete

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<sup>1</sup>The Militia was not technically one of the Auxiliary forces, but a separate and distinct body. For simplicity's sake, Auxiliary will, throughout this chapter mean the Yeomanry, Volunteers and Militia.

surrender of each force's original identity. It was here that the real difficulties, ones which Haldane did not even anticipate, arose. The Auxiliary forces had a distinguished reputation which, though disproportionate to their actual military value, could be translated into political power and influence. This was due to the fact that the officers were usually members of the landed gentry and were either M.P.s or were able in other ways to exert significant influence in the political sector. The Militiamen were especially reluctant to surrender their identity. Their force was the oldest under the Crown, older in fact than the Regular Army. The Vounteers and Yeomanry, though neither as old nor as adamantly opposed to amalgamation, were nevertheless determined to be difficult. Their reluctance was partly based on the proposed structure of the Territorial Army. Haldane intended to organise the force around uniform county associations which would be in charge of recruiting and administration, but not command. The latter would be shifted to the Crown and the General Staff. Hitherto, both administration and command had been in the hands of the local commanding officers of the individual units. They could essentially do what they liked with their force. These officers correctly perceived that what the Government intended to do was to leave them with the dreary responsibility of organising and administering their forces, while depriving them of the glory of command.

Haldane, unaware of the difficulties he was to encounter, assigned the details of the transformation to a Territorial Army Committee, soon nicknamed the 'Duma'. It was an unofficial committee, chaired by Esher, which included representatives from the Army, Government, Auxiliary forces and interested citizenry. Each group, eager for proper representation, tried to pack the committee. The Duma soon swelled to



unmanageable proportions and achieved little more than selfish bickering. It was, from the beginning, ill-equipped to handle the massive tasks assigned to it. Haig recognised this problem after his second meeting:

Attend 'Duma' at 11 o.c. Officers of very different views on the committee. The Duke of Bedford represents the Militia element. Jack Sealey a yeoman seems to think that the country requires no Army as long as the Militia and Yeomanry are kept up.<sup>1</sup>

After the following meeting, he commented that.

The Militia officers seem afraid their force will disappear if placed under the 'County Associations' and are anxious to remain under the War Office.<sup>2</sup>

Haldane finally acknowledged the Duma's incapacity and disbanded it on 15 June. The vehement opposition to his proposals startled him and left him floundering without an answer. He had not expected self-interest of this degree. His ignorance resulted in part from his tendency to delegate considerable authority to subordinates without himself acting as an attentive overseer.

Haldane next decided to call together the basic elements of the Duma into a smaller committee, for talks which he mistakenly hoped would be bilateral. The ferocious opposition did not, however, abate. These elements could not be dealt with in a bilateral-'for' versus 'against'--manner because the opposition was not of one mind. The interests and motivation of the Militia differed widely from that of the Yeomanry and Volunteers. The former were mainly interested in preserving their traditional exclusivity, while the latter two objected more to the specific mechanics of the change. But, if the Militia could be tamed, there was a good possibility that the other

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 12 June 1906. Haig joined the Duma immediately after his return from India and so could only attend the last four meetings.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 13 June 1906.

two groups would come around to the idea of a single force. With this in mind, Sir Frederick Stopford, the DMT, proposed a deal which would allow the Militia to retain its cherished identity in exchange for an agreement that troops could be sent abroad, in some cases as individual drafts to reinforce Regular Army units. Haig recorded the reaction to this proposal in his diary:

Impossible to get Militia officers to agree to wishes of W. O. Council, namely to provide drafts for the army in the field instead of expanding the Regular Army. Some are willing to supply 'companies' where required--so these sign papers to that effect, remainder sign to go abroad as 'Battalions'.<sup>1</sup>

This was not a workable solution, since a uniform policy was required. Haldane was again defeated. There appeared to be no room for compromise. The whole basis of the two-tier system was threatened.

Haig retired to Tarasp and Pontresina during the latter part of June, while Haldane desperately tried to find a new basis for agreement. At Tarasp, he met Leopold de Rothschild, who remained a friend for the rest of his life.<sup>2</sup> Upon his return, Haig was asked to 'form a committee and call in from time to time anyone whose presence . . . necessary.'<sup>3</sup> Haldane was trying to defeat the opposition by dividing it into distinct groups and dealing with the interests of each separately. This was a far more realistic approach than the earlier bilateral one. It aimed at building a solid core of supporters capable of eventually over-powering the more obdurate groups.

One element in this new plan was visits to Auxiliary forces' headquarters, where Haldane would try to convince his opponents of the merits of his plan. Haig, as a distinguished member of the Regular

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 27 June 1906.

<sup>2</sup>During the Great War, Rothschild regularly sent gifts of expensive food and wine to Haig. See Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 214(a).

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 25 August 1906.



Army, often accompanied him. Haig's single-mindedness and lack of patience with the opposition meant that he was not always the best person to act as negotiator. During this period he concentrated on convincing the commanders of the Yeomanry and Volunteers. The former were relatively easy to sway, as they had neither the size nor the solidarity of the Militia. Also, as a mounted force, they were probably impressed by the presence of one of Britain's most distinguished cavalrymen. They objected not to the idea of amalgamation, but to the subsequent policies once amalgamated.

Haig dealt with these objections with characteristic forcefulness:

Meeting at 11 with certain Yeomanry officers who had been invited to come and discuss questions with me. Lord Scarborough had made proposals for I.Y. to do advance guard cavalry work, but stipulated 'no extra training'. I told him straight, that would be impossible.<sup>1</sup>

He was not as successful at controlling the Volunteers. He wrote to Esher that 'they won't have the associations constituted as proposed at any price!'<sup>2</sup> Haig found this reluctance loathsome and somewhat surprising. He could not understand the objections to such a workable system. The Auxiliaries objected because they correctly equated progress with extinction. They fought for the survival of cherished albeit obsolete institutions. Their obstructionism was similar to Haig's attitude toward cavalry reform. The cavalry was another victim of progress. But this similarity did not inspire sympathy in Haig.

These were extremely trying times for Haldane and his aides. The unexpected vehemence of the opposition made its effect all the greater. He grasped wildly at solutions, most of which proved

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 6 September 1906.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Esher, 9 September 1906. Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).

ineffectual. Haig's activities were likewise dominated by 'frustration and disappointment. The bitterness gave rise to ill-temper. As the diary entry for 12 November shows, matters had not 'settled down' as quickly as he had earlier predicted to his sister:

At 3:30 go to House of Commons to see Sec'y of State in his private room there. Military Members have raised difficulties on question of reorganising the Militia. That seems only an excuse to show they are really angry because S. of S. does not consult them enough!

Get back to W.O. at 5:15 p.m. and see CGS. He very shirty. Tells me not to be absent on Saturdays without his approval! and wants all papers from S. of S. to be given him at once. This not my affair as these papers go to him before coming to me, but shows how angry he is. The result of someone stirring him up, no doubt Douglas backed by Miles!<sup>1</sup>

Six weeks later there was a similar entry:

Amend leaflet (with General Miles) which is to go to Press to explain the new organisation.

Fleetwood Wilson comes into my room during the operation and criticises severely the way in which he has been ignored in the matter of the new scheme. Miles also finds fault.

In afternoon I went to Miles' room with Ellison and worked out data on which non-Regular reserves is to be calculated. We are to meet at noon tomorrow with Wilson.

A terrible day of criticism, but some progress made notwithstanding!<sup>2</sup>

Miles, Wilson and Douglas,<sup>3</sup> among others, objected to Haig because of his membership in Haldane's inner circle, from which they were excluded. The hurt feelings, bruised egos and selfish obstructionism were not new experiences for Haig. The atmosphere in the War Office was not markedly different from that of the Army outside. The situation was, however, made more complex by the wide variety of opinions

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 12 November 1906.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 13 January 1907.

<sup>3</sup>Miles was Lieutenant General Sir Herbert Miles, Director of Organisation and Recruiting. Wilson was Rt. Hon. Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson, Director General of Army Finance, 1904-1908 and Member of Supreme Council of India, 1908-1913. Douglas was General Sir Charles Douglas, Second Military Member of Army Council, 1904-1909.



among the interested parties. Despite this complexity, Haig retained his characteristic aplomb and remained confident of success.

Haldane was not nearly as confident. During the autumn recess, he retired to Cloan, where he studied the situation in private. When he returned, he proposed the entire abandonment of the Territorial Army scheme. Ellison, Haig and Lord Lucas, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, managed, however, to stiffen his resolve. Haldane was re-invigorated by the support from his aides, and was grateful for it. On 2 January 1907, Haig noted that

Kind letter from Mr. Haldane received this morning. He means to go straight ahead and stand or fall by his scheme.<sup>1</sup>

The struggle with the recalcitrant Auxiliary commanders continued until mid-February. It need not be recounted in detail. While Haldane could have tried to force the new program upon the local commanders through legislation, without their consent, he would in so doing have encountered considerable resistance in Parliament. Also, Haldane realised that the success of the Territorial Army depended on the willingness of ex-Auxiliary members to join it. This willingness would evaporate if legislative force were used.

The Volunteers and Yeomanry, through a series of intricate deals and agreements, finally accepted the Haldane scheme. The Militia, however, remained intransigent. This meant that some legislative coercion became inevitable. Haldane in the end decided to abolish the Militia, but placated its members by forming a Special Reserve to act as an immediate reinforcement to the Regular Army. It was understood that the Special Reserve was to be the personal refuge for the displaced Militiamen. The Militia would lose its name, but not, it was argued, its identity. This did not mean that the two-tier

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 2 January 1907.

system was abandoned. The basis was still Regulars and Territorials, but with the Special Reserve as a rather curious adjunct to the former. It was exactly the exclusivity which the Militia coveted.

Though some diehards remained, the Special Reserve idea substantially weakened the Militia opposition. Haldane did not at first realise this. By mid-February, he was still vacillating, and was doubtful of his chances in Parliament. Advice from Esher, first tendered in the following letter, but afterwards often repeated, proved valuable:

You have got to chose between a certain amount of opposition in the H. of C. and a loss of personal prestige in the country. To my mind the position is not doubtful. You can, with your large majority, risk the former. You cannot risk the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Haldane probably had this advice in mind when he presented his second Army Estimates to Parliament on 25 February. Before a packed Commons,<sup>2</sup> he explained his proposals regarding the Territorial Army. He was testing members' reactions to the scheme, and, even more important, he was appealing beyond the Commons to the Nation. He spoke of the fine traditions of the Auxiliary forces, but stressed that twentieth century conditions in politics and warfare made consolidation and modernisation of Britain's reserve forces imperative. Sacrifices, he emphasised, had to be made. The speech, which lasted three hours and twenty minutes, was well received. Haldane had the mandate to proceed as he wished.

The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act (TARFA), formally drafted in January, did not receive its first reading until 4 March 1907. The bill contained three major provisions. The first dealt with the

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Spiers, Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>The House was so full that Haig had to endure the three-hour speech on the arm of a chair. See Diary, 25 February 1907.



formation of the Territorial Army. The second stipulated that the force was liable for service anywhere in the United Kingdom and that its size would be determined by Parliament. It further stipulated that the force would be divided into separate commands, complete in all arms and services. The third provision covered the creation of the Special Reserve. Throughout the process toward final approval, the opposition which Haldane expected did not materialise. M.P.s who, because of their close affinity with the Auxiliary units, opposed the bill were in most cases seen as selfish and short-sighted and were therefore ignored.<sup>1</sup> The bill was passed by 286 votes to 63 on 19 June 1907. It went into effect on 1 April 1908.

The passage of TARFA marked the end of the first phase of Haig's service at the War Office. The Territorial Army scheme had dominated his activities over the previous eight months. It was not work which was ideally suited to his talents. He was unused to crowded meetings and had little patience for different opinions. His discomfort among strangers and his at times self-righteous attitude made him not very effective at negotiation, though he did provide valuable aid in working out the mechanics of the scheme. Haldane realised that Haig's manner could be a hindrance to progress, but supported him in spite of this.<sup>2</sup> He probably realised that once TARFA

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<sup>1</sup>Corelli Barnett, in Britain and Her Army (London: Allen Lane, 1970), p. 366, argues that TARFA was 'savagely attacked during its passage through both houses of Parliament'. In fact, as Spiers points out in his chapter dealing with the act (Haldane: An Army Reformer, pp. 92-115), M.P.s found the bill excessively dull and few of the debates were well attended.

<sup>2</sup>As discussed on page 296, many senior officers in the War Office and the Army as a whole resented the influence that the relatively young Haig had with Haldane. Spiers (*Ibid.*, pp. 151-153) discusses this and quotes a letter Haldane wrote to Esher after Haig left the W.O.: 'Haig always infuriated Miles by his manner, and it may be easier now.' Miles was by that time Quartermaster General.

was passed negotiation would give way to administration, a task at which Haig was more suited.

At the same time that the Territorial Army was being devised, Haig and Haldane were concerned with the formation of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). While this was an extremely important task, it was not nearly as difficult as the formation of a reserve army. There was no significant opposition to Haldane's plans in this area.<sup>1</sup> The BEF was formally created in an Army Order issued 1 January 1907. The order set up a field force of 120,000 men which was designed to be organised in such a way as to be capable of rapid mobilisation on the outbreak of war. Before 1907, an expeditionary force did not exist. The British Army was at that time little more than a collection of regiments, with only one properly organised corps at Aldershot. The Army Order provided for the coordination of this disorganised mass into one cavalry and six infantry divisions. With the subsequent passage of TARFA, the two-tier system--as Haldane intended it--was a reality.

The BEF created by the Army Order of 1 January 1907 was essentially the force that went to war in August 1914, with the rapidity that was intended. But it must again be emphasised that neither the size nor the composition of the force were dictated by a continental strategy, as Haldane later claimed. The Army Order was a pragmatic response to financial exigencies. Army Estimates were frozen at £28 million. There was in fact significant pressure to lower them. In its pre-1907 form, the Army was wasteful and inefficient. By consolidating into seven major commands, waste could be reduced

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<sup>1</sup>The relative ease of the task is demonstrated by the fact that Haig hardly mentions the work done on the BEF in his diaries. The entries during this period are dominated by the descriptions of the wrangles over the Territorial Army.



and the Army could reach its maximum size, given the financial restrictions. It was even necessary to dispose of a number of field batteries and infantry battalions (including two from the Guards) in order to make ends meet. It is significant that the Cavalry, probably due to Haig's influence and the evidence of the Boer War, was not touched.

The Army Order creating the BEF did not mean that Britain was suddenly equipped with a force of 120,000 men ready to fight on the continent within fourteen days. This was the intent; the actuality would follow years of hard work. It was to this problem that Haig directed his attention after the fight for TARRA was won. His tasks in this area varied widely. He organised staff tours, made mobilisation plans, carried out mock embarkations and disembarkations, inspected troops and devised training schemes, in addition to many other chores. The emphasis was upon uniformity, efficiency and preparedness, which meant that Haig was particularly well-suited to the work. Technically, he had become DMT on 28 August 1906, but, as mentioned previously, his tasks were not confined to the formal duties of that directorate. Haldane used Haig's talents where they seemed applicable.

Shortly after Haig became DMT, Haldane commented that 'he has impressed me greatly by the change for the better initiated even in his first fortnight.'<sup>1</sup> Spiers writes as follows of Haldane's reliance upon Haig:

. . . he came to rely upon officers who sympathised with his own objectives, who could think clearly and who grasped the detailed implications of Army Reform: he came to rely, above all, upon Douglas Haig.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haldane to Esher, 8 September 1906. Quoted in Spiers, Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

In appraising the Army reform of the Liberal Government, it must be kept in mind that Haldane was above all a politician. He approached his office with certain goals and used all of his political talents to accomplish them. His main goal was to implement the Esher Report--to make the restructured Army outlined in that report a reality. Once the main framework was established, the details were handed over to men like Haig, with Haldane acting as a passive, and at times not very attentive, overseer. Haldane was not bothered by trifles. This meant that the detailed content of 'his' reforms reflected not so much his thinking as that of his closest advisors.

As Spiers points out, one of Haldane's methods was to rely heavily on, and allow wide latitude to, those who 'sympathised with his own objectives'. The other side of this policy was that he ignored those who disagreed with him. This meant that the War Office was dominated by Haldane men--men implicitly loyal to their chief and his plan. Others, because they differed with the Territorial Army scheme or another facet of the Haldane plan, were not called upon to contribute. These included men like Plumer, Roberts and Henry Wilson who, especially in the fields of tactics and strategy, had much to offer. The loyalists, on the other hand, were rewarded by being allowed a free hand to shape the Army as they saw fit. In Haig's case, this meant that War Office coffers were thrown open for an extraordinary number of cavalry staff tours and other exercises which were basically a continuation of the traditionalist practices which had been the norm while Haig was in India. Much of the cavalry reaction which dominated the pre-war years, such as the re-institution of the lance and the publication of the revised Cavalry Training, though by no means implemented by Haldane, was conducted with his tacit approval. Haldane apparently did not feel that these matters were



his concern. Perhaps they were not. Yet it must be emphasised that he provided an ideal environment in which Haig's conservatism could thrive, sheltered from the censure of those of different mind.

One area in which this arrangement was particularly evident was in the matter of the Territorial Artillery. A basic principle of the Territorial Army was that the force was to be complete in all arms. This was a plan which was simple to formulate, but difficult to administer. The modern guns to equip properly the reserve army did not exist. In addition, modern artillery tactics required a level of training and instruction which was impossible to implement within the short training period of the Territorial Army. Lord Roberts reacted to the prospect of ill-equipped and ill-trained batteries by rejecting the whole idea of an artillery contingent for the Territorial Army. He was supported in the Commons by Arthur Lee, who argued that half-trained batteries armed with ancient guns would be no match for the professional artillerymen of Germany. Roberts maintained in the Lords that the Territorials would not 'in spite of their numbers, be of the slightest use in the field'. They would, he argued, be a 'positive danger'.<sup>1</sup>

Esher, in support of Haldane, countered that 'It is a question not between Regular Artillery and Half-trained Artillery, but between Half-trained and none at all.'<sup>2</sup> It was actually a question of quantity and quality, and whether it was right for the former to exist without the latter. Roberts was clear on this point. When he campaigned in favour of Universal Service, he aimed at both quality and quantity. He desired a system which ensured a large force of men and the time to train them properly. Though he continued to

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<sup>1</sup>Parliamentary Debates, 12 March 1908.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

struggle for this system until 1914, TARFA essentially defeated him. TARFA provided the large force, but skimmed on the training. Roberts, the soldier, abhorred this idea. Haldane, the pragmatic politician, saw it as the only available solution to the nation's needs. He accepted the half measure because it satisfied his basic aims. He was not overly interested if the force he created was technically deficient; the important point was that it existed. The technical aspects were the concern of the Army proper, not his Ministry. If quality suffered, it was not his fault, but that of a parsimonious nation.

On the question of Territorial Artillery, however, Roberts was right. He was, after all, an artilleryman. Roberts realised that the impending European conflagration would be disastrous for British reserve gunners if Haldane's policies were not changed. To his mind 'none at all' would be better than 'half-trained'. Haldane, on the other hand, was concerned more with the political exigencies of 1907 than with the military problems of the future. He rejected Roberts' advice because Roberts, while fighting for Universal Service, had worked at cross purposes to the campaign for TARFA. Haldane therefore accepted the advice of his loyalists on the subject of artillery--men like Haig who, as has been seen, had little respect for or knowledge of the arm.

Haig's support of Haldane on the subject of the Territorial Artillery was maintained in spite of his direct experience of the low standard of both Regular and Auxiliary gunners.<sup>1</sup> As DNT, he staged a number of field firing exercises which were designed to 'bring the musketry and artillery "fire" schools into close

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<sup>1</sup>They would still have been called Auxiliaries because TARFA had yet to come into effect.



touch.'<sup>1</sup> At these exercises, Regular Artillery, Royal Horse Artillery and batteries from the Auxiliaries practised together. The idea was that the Auxiliaries would learn from the professionals. Haig soon found, however, that the standards of the latter were not worthy of imitation. On 25 June 1907, he found that the firing of the Greys and 18th Hussars was 'Not Good. I make a few remarks re cut and dried schemes.'<sup>2</sup> 'Cut and dried', it will be remembered, was Haig's favourite expression when criticising performances which appeared to be straight from the manuals and took no account of actual conditions. Later, he wrote the following about an exercise involving both Regular and Auxiliary batteries:

Ride to where Battalion Volunteer Artillery are in position with Scots' Greys. Find Leach commanding guns and squadrons and generally meddling with all and sundry.

Operations rather a farce.<sup>3</sup>

These complaints were similar to ones made years earlier when Haig was assistant to Keith Fraser. He emphasised that 'freedom of subordinates must not be interfered with'.<sup>4</sup> But he made hardly any comments on the technical aspects of the firing: the aim, range, accuracy, cover, organisation, etc. While he may have been right on the other points, it is questionable how valuable his artillery inspections and advice were if his Boer War experience--which had such a profound effect upon him--taught him to have little respect for the arm's potential.

During his remaining time as DMT, Haig concentrated upon turning the BEF and Territorial Army into forces capable of going to war.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 10 June 1907.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 25 June 1907.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 4 July 1907.

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 27 June 1907.

With regard to the Territorial Army, this initially meant working out the size of the force and the quotas to be raised by the various county associations. Haig, ignoring political and financial limitations, at first envisaged a force of 900,000 men. Haldane saw this for the fantasy it was and sought a more realistic figure of 300,000. He was not, in the end, even able to raise this number. Haig was better suited to devising the logistical and administrative details (other than the size) of the Territorial Army. During May 1907, he worked out plans for the formation of a transport section for the force. Later in the same month, he concentrated upon infantry training procedures. The immense amount of work and the elementary nature of it reflects the inadequacy of the Auxiliary forces prior to their amalgamation. The raw material of the Territorial Army was indeed raw.

Haig put these somewhat mundane tasks behind him when he left the DMT for the DSD in November 1907. The duties of the DSD were more suited to his interests and talents. Haldane, as will be remembered, wanted Haig for the DSD in early 1906, but felt unable to remove Hutchinson. When the latter's term was complete, the change could take place. But, when Haig moved from DMT to DSD, both directorates were re-designed to suit his abilities. He explained in his diary:

Meeting in S. of S.'s room at 11:30 a.m. CGS [Lyttleton], Kiggell and myself, with Mr. Haldane.

Sir N. Lyttleton took papers which I gave him last night showing proposals for rearranging duties in DSD and DMT on the lines that all education (except Staff College) pass to DMT and war organisation go to DSD. By this means DSD will have sufficient officers to work out 'Principles of employment of troops' and other fundamental questions which have hitherto been ignored.

Sir N. gave papers to S. of S. stating that they summarised his views. This very satisfactory considering his



opposition hitherto! S. of S. congratulated him on the far reaching nature of the changes contemplated!<sup>1</sup>

This was Haldane's, and Haig's, way of ensuring that the most important tasks would be handled by the person they both agreed was most capable of handling them.

Haig had always believed that efficiency in wartime was impossible without a well-trained, professional staff. The obstacles to the formation of a British General Staff on the German model have been discussed at length. As DSD, Haig was finally in a position from which he could remove some of these obstacles. He sought to increase the output of the Staff College, improve the quality of its product, and make sure that its graduates were favoured with prestigious staff appointments and accelerated promotion. At the same time he had to change the attitudes of the Army's conservative elites, men who had a low opinion of the College and were generally reluctant to rely on a staff in wartime. There was, in addition, a very complicated problem facing Haig--one which he probably did not completely understand. This centred on the traditional British confusion over the role of a staff. There was uncertainty as to whether the Army required a purely administrative staff--as had been the custom in the past--or a 'brain of the army'. If the Army wanted the latter, not only new institutions, but an even more radical and widespread change of attitude was required. Promising young soldiers had to be taught to think creatively about grand tactics and strategy. Senior officers open-minded enough to teach them had to be found. And, 'old soldiers' had to be convinced that the days of Britain's omnipotent commanders were gone.

While Haig may not have totally understood the above complexity,

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 8 November 1907.

he was certainly aware of it. His awareness was stimulated by a letter from Kitchener, dated 28 April 1908, in which the problems in forming a British General Staff were discussed. Kitchener, despite his previous adherence to the concept of the omnipotent commander, displayed uncharacteristic insight:

My dear Haig,

You are I think much hampered in England in the training of the General Staff in their proper duties, by the to my mind fatal division that exists between what is called the administrative and technical functions, and those of military training.

In war remember every additional channel of communication of orders is a danger. Every additional unnecessary staff non-combatant is a drag on the fighting line.

We all agree that the higher art of war should be thoroughly learned and practised by the General Staff so that they may be in a position to advise the General in command how to conduct the operations with certainty and without risk of failure at all times and under all circumstances with the object of placing his men in the most advantageous positions to meet the enemy. To enable the General Staff to do this an accurate practical knowledge of the effect of Time and possibilities is essential. The divorce of administrative and technical and their non-practice in peace by the General Staff to my mind introduces grave risks of serious mistakes in the advice given to a General by his General Staff officers.

To employ some General Staff officers on administrative duties as established in England would not in my opinion meet this difficulty.

Napoleon's staff were more engaged in discussing onions than strategy or tactics. The best soldiers will not fight unless they are fed and supplied with fighting necessities. Theoretical training in these matters however elaborate is apt in practice to lead to quite wrong conclusions sometimes preventing advantages being taken of an opportunity through fear of running an unknown risk at others of wildly starting operations and finding out later that they cannot be carried through, both of these in war spell failure.

I hope you will consider these points when laying down what the duties of the General Staff are in war and peace which as you say is undoubtedly a preliminary step of the utmost importance in the formation of a General Staff.

KITCHENER<sup>1</sup>

In view of the above letter, Kitchener should perhaps be partially

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<sup>1</sup>Kitchener to Haig, 28 April 1908, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 334(e).



excused for his reluctance to delegate authority to his staff. He believed that the study of war had to be approached holistically, that the staff officer had to be able to perform all the tasks--whether administrative or technical--which arose in war. It is possible that Kitchener rejected the advice of his staff officers, or did not seek it, because he was not confident that they were trained in this way. He controlled everything himself because his abilities were the only ones in which he was supremely confident. Had capable staff officers been available, his attitude might have been different.

Kitchener's letter outlined the major problems which faced Haig. He had to create the institutions and encourage the attitudes which would produce officers trained not only as administrators but as technical thinkers. At the same time, he had to ensure that there was no confusion between these two functions. He then had to 'sell' these new staff officers to older commanders used to the techniques of Victoria's small wars. If he failed at any of these monumental tasks, the result would be a system nearly as chaotic as the old one. There are two main reasons why Haig was not the man for these tasks. The first was his mixture of administrative progressivism and tactical dogmatism. He had been chosen to reform the British Army because his organisational talents were considered valuable at a time when the Army was badly in need of structural reform. His limitations at the War Office were revealed whenever an open mind to progress in strategy and tactics was required. A new age of military science had dawned, and it was one in which Haig's cavalry mind was out of place. His Boer War experiences had rendered him virtually unable to see the mistakes in his tactical thinking. While Haig was perhaps the best man to establish the

institutions necessary for a 'brain of the army', he was ill-equipped to start it thinking or to benefit from its thoughts.

A second, equally important, reason for Haig's inadequacy was that his attitudes seem to have been not altogether different from those of the men whose minds he had to change. Haig often expressed a belief in the value of highly trained, independent staff officers. There was, however, a marked difference between principles and practice. It will be recalled that he once wrote of his preference for loyal men of average intelligence. This preference survived until 1918, when Herbert Lawrence, a strong-willed, individualistic officer, was forced on Haig as his Chief of Staff. Up until that time, his closest advisors did not conform very well to the model of the perfect staff officer. Haig surrounded himself with men whose loyalty to and admiration for him hindered them in the performance of their duties. Three of these men--Charteris, Kiggell and J. H. Davidson--formed the nucleus of Haig's Great War staff. During the war they formed an effective barrier between Haig and the realities of the conflict. Their performance is the best evidence of Haig's inconsistencies with regard to the ideal staff officer. This point will be argued in greater depth in the Epilogue. But it is important to emphasise at this stage how the Great War revealed Haig's true attitudes toward the staff. Before the war he echoed the reformist line and advocated a staff on the German model. But his heart was not completely in it. When war came, he behaved like the traditional omnipotent commander. While he may have sympathised with everything about which Kitchener wrote, his basic nature prevented him from implementing the policies completely, or adequately applying them to himself.

Haig's administrative achievements in the formation of a British



General Staff were nevertheless considerable. He carried out especially noteworthy reforms of the staff training programme and the policies toward employment of staff officers. For instance, one week after becoming DSD he convinced the CGS that in future all commanding officers should be forced to take the staff officers supplied them, rather than being allowed to choose their own.<sup>1</sup> This effectively limited patronage, an anathema to professionalism. Haig also worked out a system whereby important staff positions with the Territorial Army would be given to graduates of the Staff College, thus extending the areas in which valuable experience and responsibility could be gained.<sup>2</sup> In the training of staff officers, Haig noted the following plans on 2 February 1908:

Motored with Blair and Kiggell to Staff College where Mr. Haldane and Ellison joined us about noon.

Considered steps necessary to enlarge Staff College to extent of 22 students. Lunched with Commandant (General Henry Wilson). After lunch I explained my scheme for creating a number of War Schools. Mr Haldane much pleased and said he would arrange to find money for both.<sup>3</sup>

The War Schools were to be institutions at which senior staff officers would actively study higher strategy and tactics. They were designed to imitate the German practice of continuing education for senior officers and were thus an essential complement to the elementary instruction provided by the Staff College. Though Haig cannot be blamed for the failure to adequately implement the War Schools scheme before the war, the schools are nevertheless another example of his limitations as a military reformer. He recognised the necessity of institutions which encouraged creative thought, and could at times

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<sup>1</sup>See Diary, 16 November 1907.

<sup>2</sup>See Diary, 4 January 1908.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 2 February 1908.

set them in motion, but did not himself extend this progressive attitude to a personal examination and periodic re-evaluation of his own military doctrine.

Another example of Haig's limitations lay in the publication while he was DSD of Field Service Regulations. The manual, which came in two volumes, was the first of its kind in British military history. Volume I dealt with Operations, Volume II with Organisation and Administration. It must be emphasised that FSR was not Haig's creation. The work was begun in 1904 by Colonel Walter Adye of the DSD. The publication had, however, been blocked by rivalries within the War Office. Upon becoming DSD, Haig devoted himself to removing the obstacles in the way of publication. This was his main achievement as far as the FSR was concerned. His efforts included organising staff tours for testing the manual's precepts, which convinced those who doubted its viability. Some senior officers were, however, not convinced, and had to be dealt with differently. At one meeting, General Miles ridiculed the FSR in an uproarious speech which had everyone--except Haig--laughing. When he finished, Haig took the floor and angrily answered that if Miles

. . . will tell us what we ought to do instead of pulling everything to pieces, we shall get on much better. Let us have some system to start with, and if it is not perfect we can improve it.<sup>1</sup>

It was determination of this sort which forced the final approval of the FSR in December 1908.

Corelli Barnett writes as follows on the publication of the FSR in his book Britain and Her Army:

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Duff Cooper, Haig, pp. 106-107. Duff Cooper does not state that the individual in question was Miles, but Spiers (Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 152), points out that it was indeed him.



Without these manuals . . . the colossal expansion of the British and Dominion Armies during the Great War must have resulted in military chaos.<sup>1</sup>

Terraine calls it a 'major, but almost entirely forgotten contribution to later victory'.<sup>2</sup> The manual did fill an immense gap in Britain's military preparedness. It was intended to be a guide for the Army's new breed of professional staff officers, providing them with a detailed manual covering every conceivable contingency which could arise in war. As such it stressed a level of order, efficiency, precision and standardisation which was previously lacking. FSR was of significant value during the Great War. It was a modern development, but Haig should not be given credit for its modernity, as both Terraine and Marshall-Cornwall suggest. Since it was not his creation, it should not be treated as a reflection of his military doctrine, another mistake which Marshall-Cornwall makes. He uses the manual as proof that Haig's tactical dogmatism--at least as far as the cavalry was concerned--had mellowed. He cites the following from FSR, Volume I:

Ability to move rapidly and to cover relatively short distances in a comparatively short time gives cavalry power to obtain information and to combine attack and surprise to the best advantage. The fact that it is armed with a long range rifle has endowed it with great independence, and extended its sphere of action.<sup>3</sup>

The above is not an example of a 'more realistic principle', as Marshall-Cornwall argues. It is no different from the beliefs

Haig professed in 1902. He was never opposed to firearms for the cavalry; he only rejected the complete replacement of the arme blanche by rifles and the resultant dismounted offensive role.

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<sup>1</sup>Barnett, Britain and Her Army, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Field Service Regulations, (H.M.S.O. 1909), Volume I, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, p. 75.

On the subject of dismounted action and the arme blanche, Haig's attitude had not changed at all. At the same time that he was working on the FSR, he was also completing Cavalry Studies and pushing for the reinstitution of the lance. On 12 February 1909, he noted in his diary that he argued with Winston Churchill about the value of the lance and the sabre.<sup>1</sup> While DSD he staged a large number of cavalry staff tours and manoeuvres. Their content was influenced by him. The supervision of these exercises was not one of his duties as DSD. He attended them so as to be certain that heretical doctrines would not be practised. This is clear from the following:

Rode over to Uffington Camp with my Staff and attended meeting at 10:30 a.m. of Brigadiers and C.O.s with Inspector General (Sir J. French). Latter very complimentary to me--said I had nothing to gain from the extra work I had undertaken in training the Cavalry Divisions etc. etc. but gave vent to some real heresies such as chief aim of Cavalry Division in battle is their rifle fire: led horses to be moved and men need not be close to them. Cavalry should always go for its adversary.<sup>2</sup>

The prospect of Haig clashing with French over cavalry doctrine was a novel one. French, it will be recalled, wrote in 1903 that nothing could make him alter the views that he held on cavalry. Yet something had changed his mind, however slightly. Haig's mind remained unaffected.

Another general misconception surrounds Haig's role in the formation of an Imperial General Staff. In preparing the way for an agreement among Britain's imperial partners, Haig did what he could do best: he prepared studies, worked out proposals, and made intricate plans pertaining to the unification, standardisation and cooperation of the forces of the Empire. All this was exceedingly valuable work.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 12 February 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 11 September 1907.



Haldane commented as follows on Haig's effort:

When the General Staff was in full operation, he and Nicholson set to work to do what I proposed to them. They expanded the organisation so as to make it one not merely for Great Britain but for the Dominions and India. When this scheme was completed, there was held in London in 1909 a Dominion Conference on military affairs. The last conference had failed so far as these matters were concerned because of the desire of the old War Office to centralise authority. But we were now able to say that the Dominions and India could remain completely autonomous. All we asked of them was that they should organise on our pattern local sections of their own of the General Staff, and should appoint to them officers who had a General Staff training at headquarters and in the Staff College. . . . Haig worked out the details of the plan, and Nicholson embodied them in admirable drafts for the assistance of the Colonial and India Offices. I could not have had finer help than I got from these two.<sup>1</sup>

Haig's achievements should not be underestimated. But neither should they be exaggerated. The creation of the Imperial General Staff was above all a political achievement. It involved the subtle and careful handling of men with a wide variety of interests. This was not Haig's domain.

When the Colonial Conference met for the final debate on the Imperial General Staff in April 1909, it is clear that Haig, both literally and figuratively, took a back seat:

I had a most interesting forenoon yesterday. I met Mr. Haldane and attended the Colonial Conference with him. . . . At 11 o'clock Mr. Haldane took his seat on Lord Elgin's right. The latter presided. The Premiers were sitting on a horseshoe table on each side of him in order of seniority of the Colonies. . . . We . . . had chairs placed for us behind Haldane. The latter made a short speech of twenty minutes explaining our organisation, and ended with a motion for the Conference to adopt. All the Premiers then spoke in turn--all very patriotic. Mr. Haldane's speech was very well received . . . His motion was also agreed to. The latter practically creates the Imperial General Staff and puts 50 per cent on to the value of the General Staff.<sup>2</sup>

The successful conclusion of the Imperial Conference completed Haig's

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<sup>1</sup>Haldane, Autobiography, 199-200.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 21 April 1909.

major tasks at the War Office. He began with the framework of reform provided him by Esher and Haldane. Between 1906 and 1909 he added substance to their skeletal ideas for the Territorial Army, the General Staff and the Imperial General Staff. After April, he spent the rest of the year on mundane tasks which no doubt he would have preferred to leave to someone else. He had, he felt, done all that was required of him and was ready for a new challenge. His chance came in October when he went to India to become CGS there.

The years in London had been eventful ones. Haig's days were spent busily at the War Office, his nights at the social gatherings or in consultation with Haldane until very late. While Haldane was used to this level and type of activity--to long nights, rich food, strong drink and huge cigars--Haig was not. His fitness declined. His physical activity dwindled and he put on weight.<sup>1</sup> The stress and unhealthy lifestyle affected his physical condition, which was in turn exacerbated by his usual hypochondria. He took trips to continental spas, and consulted a number of medical practitioners, some of whose methods were rather questionable.<sup>2</sup> During 1908, he became seriously ill with a mysterious illness which confined him to bed for over a month. He recovered completely, but did so with a firm conviction that this was not the type of life for him.

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<sup>1</sup>On this subject, Haig wrote the following in his diary on 18 January 1908, from Sandringham: 'General Sir George Higginson arrived. He was here with me ten years ago. My weight then 11.8, the same as his. Now I am 12 st. 11 lb. and he is still the same. He remembered as an Eton boy seeing the King christened. He is now 82 years of age and just as fit as he was ten years ago.'

<sup>2</sup>For instance, there is the following from the diary, 7 February 1907: 'Henrietta gets a Dr. Moore, a magnetic health giver to come to treat me.' The treatments with Moore continued almost daily for over a month.



In February 1909, Haig attended a performance of An Englishman's Home. The play depicted an invasion of Britain by a continental army and ridiculed the lack of preparation by the people. When it was first performed it had a profound effect upon Londoners. Army recruiting figures suddenly rose. Haldane, recognising its propaganda value, even donated War Office funds toward the play's continued production. Later, however, it became something of a cult phenomenon, with the audiences laughing during the parts when they were supposed to be dutifully shocked. This was hardly Haig's experience:

It is very extraordinary how the play draws crowded houses every night, and how impressed the audiences seem to be with the gravity of the scenes. I trust good may result and 'universal training' become the law of the land, but for myself last night's performance was not an interesting sight--the incapacity of the whole of the people in defending their homes was disgusting.<sup>1</sup>

After three years of incessant work modernising his country's Army, weaknesses such as the play depicted rankled with Haig. He had, since 1897, seen the Germans as the probable enemy in Britain's next great war. His knowledge of the German Army caused him to take this prospect seriously.

From the beginning of his time at the War Office, Haig saw his main purpose to be the preparation for war. Haldane saw his as that of tailoring a new army to fit the national mood and budget. But by 1909, the two were agreed with regard to the future:

Lunched with Mr. Haldane and walked with him to the House of Commons. No one else at lunch. We discussed objects for which Army and Expeditionary Force exist. He is in no doubt --viz. to support France and Russia against Germany and perhaps Austria. By organising war may be prevented.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 3 February 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 18 February 1909. As a sidelight, this may at first seem to contradict the argument on page 280 that Haldane made up his foresight in retrospect. In fact it does not. The continuing Anglo-German naval rivalry and other disagreements between the two countries had, by 1909, convinced Haldane and most in Britain that Germany would be

In the end war was not prevented. But neither Haig nor Haldane ever had any doubts that they had done the best they possibly could to prepare the country. Haldane argued this point at length in Before the War. Haig made similar arguments during and after the war. 'The organisation of the Army for War', he wrote, dated from the time he and Haldane were together at the War Office. Until that time, 'no one knew for what purpose our Army existed!'<sup>1</sup>

Neither Haldane nor Haig were the best judges of their accomplishments. The work of both was incomplete because of their respective limitations. Haig's was limited by his blinkered approach to strategy and tactics. His belief in the sanctity of traditional cavalry prevented a complete understanding of the changes in military science which were in progress. For instance, though he accepted the value of the machine gun and modern artillery, he believed that both could be incorporated into a strategy in which the cavalry's role remained a constant. Likewise, though he recognised the likelihood of a European war and appreciated the size and strength of European armies, he did not ponder the possibility that the clash of these great armies would result in a war completely different from those of the past. Haig erred because he failed to understand that the science of war is ever-changing. For this reason, the Army he helped to create--though superficially more efficient--in tactical terms was based on the fundamentals of the Victorian age. A further limitation was the fact that Haig seemed to see an administrative solution to every

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the enemy in an impending war. He no doubt kept this in mind during his reform of the Army. But the size of the Army he created--a small fraction of German strength--is adequate proof that the German threat was not, as he argued, the primary motivation behind his reforms.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Haldane, 18 November 1918. Quoted in Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, p. 77. It has not been possible to locate the original of this letter.



problem. He apparently did not understand that reforming men's minds, or his mind for that matter, was far more difficult than setting up a new institutional framework. Haldane, on the other hand, was limited by his pragmatic acceptance of what he could and could not accomplish. He reformed only what could be reformed. What he could not change, or was not bothered to change, he left alone. Haldane and Haig formed an effective political partnership. They exchanged loyalty to each other for assistance in implementing each other's pet projects. Their achievements were above all political ones, achieved through compromise, and therefore incomplete.

The time which Haig spent at the War Office was in keeping with the new focus to his career which began after the Boer War. As was discussed at the beginning of the last chapter, from 1902 to 1914 Haig consolidated his position within the Army. His service under Haldane enhanced his career prospects significantly. He demonstrated his devotion to the Army and his acceptance of the need for reform. Though he worked for a Liberal Government, he successfully avoided party ties. It was, and is, safe to assume that he would have worked equally as hard had the party in power been different. In other respects, however, the period had little effect upon him. It did not cause him to re-think the military doctrines which had been confirmed by the Boer War. There was, perhaps, a negative aspect to his service in the War Office. Ever since his association with Fraser in 1894, his duties had been predominantly administrative. His only experience of direct command of fighting men was during a brief and unspectacular period in the Sudan Campaign. Since that time he had been either a staff officer or a senior commander with mainly administrative duties. His service with Haldane was a continuation of this trend and thus a reinforcement of the attitudes and habits

it engendered. Haig had, perhaps unintentionally, developed into a 'paper' general. For too much of his career, he was too far removed from experiences associated with commanding men in combat. The gulf between him and the common soldier was dangerously wide. Unfortunately, Haig had neither the insight nor the capacity for self-examination to correct these inadequacies.



## CHAPTER IX

On the Eve of War, 1909-1914

While at the War Office, Haig possessed a great deal of power and influence. His relationship with Haldane allowed him to shape the Army virtually as he wished. After such an arrangement, any subsequent appointment--short of active service--would have been by nature anti-climactic. It is nevertheless curious that Haig next went to India as Chief of the General Staff. He never particularly enjoyed service in India, particularly because of the way it distanced him from the military issues in Britain. This was particularly relevant in 1909. Haig was certain that a great European war loomed. He believed that Britain had no more than three years to prepare herself.<sup>1</sup> The time would have to be used wisely if outright disaster was to be avoided. Yet at this very moment Haig chose to leave the centre of activity and escape to its outer perimeter.

The system of military administration in India had changed since Haig left in 1906, but it was no less chaotic than before. The Kitchener-Curzon argument had, it will be recalled, centred on the authority of the Commander-in-Chief and the First Military Member. Kitchener's victory resulted in both posts being subsequently occupied by one man. This was, however, an incomplete reform. There were no corresponding changes in the administrative apparatus connected to each office. The posts were simply joined, not amalgamated. Each had its own intricate, and totally distinct, network of officials ranged beneath it. Since both posts were held by one man, some comic, but no less serious, problems resulted:

It was inevitable that . . . all important cases came before the Commander-in-Chief twice, each time submitted by different subordinates, who probably each advocated different and often contradictory solutions of the same problem. Cases

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<sup>1</sup>See the 27 April 1909 letter from Haig to Kiggell, quoted on page 325, for an example of Haig's thoughts on the impending war.



were not unknown of the Commander-in-Chief disagreeing with himself as Army Member.<sup>1</sup>

This was ordinarily the sort of tangle Haig delighted in unravelling. The problems were no more complicated than those he had encountered at the War Office. But, as CGS, Haig would not be able to reform the system. He could suggest changes but he could not himself initiate policy. He would have to tolerate the mess and try to accomplish things in spite of it.

The memory of past problems and the anticipation of future ones in an Indian military system which had not improved at first caused Haig to decline the post of CGS when the Commander-in-Chief, Sir O'Moore Creagh, offered it. As he described on 15 March 1909:

He asked me to go to India as his Chief of Staff. I declined at first saying that I was so fully engaged on the Imperial General Staff and other important matters--besides the Simla people were such a crooked lot I could not work with them! He replied that he would like to join with me in ousting the rascals! and said I could think the matter over for a week!<sup>2</sup>

To Kiggell, he gave more personal reasons for his reluctance:

Personally I would rather stay at home, besides it means leaving the children here, and my wife coming out with me and visiting them each winter etc.<sup>3</sup>

Creagh persisted and Haig finally relented. There is nevertheless uncertainty as to why, in view of the above reservations, Haig accepted the post.

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 15 March 1909. Haig at first referred to the post as Chief of Staff than, later, Chief of the General Staff (CGS). Both are the same, though the General Staff was not technically in existence in India before Haig arrived. For convenience, Haig's position will hereafter be referred to as CGS.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Launcelot Kiggell, 24 April 1909, Kiggell Papers, I/1. The letters from Haig to Kiggell are all from this source and will hereafter be referred to as 'Haig to Kiggell', followed by the date, with the citation in parentheses.

Timing might be one explanation. At the same time that Haig thought his best work at the War Office was complete, no better appointment than India arose. As he advanced up the military ladder, the number of available assignments decreased. They were possibly made fewer as a result of the bruised egos which Haig caused among his senior officers at the War Office. These men were powerless to affect Haig's future as long as he remained under Haldane's wing. But, when he emerged from beneath it, they could make things difficult for him. Finally, the move from DSD to CGS India seems curious in Haig's case only. It was actually an ordinary, if slight, move upward. It is strange in Haig's case because the title of DSD was always an inadequate description of the power he actually held. But this power had been supplied by Haldane; it was not easily convertible outside the War Office. Within the Army as a whole, Haig was simply DSD, a Major General with little seniority, only forty-eight years old, and a bit of a headache to many of his superiors. CGS India was the best he could expect.

This still does not explain why Haig escaped to the Indian backwater when he could have stayed at the War Office. The best explanation is the standard one: duty. This is demonstrated in two letters to Kiggell. The first, dated 24 April 1909, outlined what Haig felt his duty entailed:

. . . Sir O'Moore Creagh has asked me to go to India as his Chief of Staff. At first I refused, but as he pressed me, and, on thinking the matter over, and looking at the importance of starting a General Staff in India, weeding out Simla and developing the Imperial General Staff, I thought it best I should go.<sup>1</sup>

He elaborated on this three days later:

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 24 April 1909. The 'crooked lot' at Simla were the British officers who had spent their entire careers in the Indian Army and whom Haig considered an obstacle to progress.



As regards meeting 'the storm' which we all foresee, it seems to me that it will take a long time, we'll win by wearing the enemy out, if we are only allowed three more years to prepare and organise the Empire. And it is of vital importance to have the machinery available in India trained as soon as possible to turn out Staff Officers who may be of use when the time comes, and the resources of that country organised for Imperial needs, instead of only for India's at present. It was this idea that made me accept Sir O'M's offer, and I honestly believe that I can do more good with him than here during the next three years. He is most anxious to work on sound lines and it is for the G.S. here to do its utmost to help him.<sup>1</sup>

The Indian appointment was therefore an important if unpleasant responsibility in the task of preparing the Empire for war. Haig accepted his duty with characteristic self-sacrifice. Once he agreed to the appointment, he dedicated himself to it and began to formulate ambitious plans.

Before he could leave, however, there were a number of important matters which required his attention. In July, he paid a last visit to King Edward VII at Balmoral. The King, who had been such a gracious benefactor, died the following May. While at Balmoral, Haig was created K.C.V.O. There were also important matters pertaining to the Army. Haig delayed his departure long enough to attend the cavalry manoeuvres at Uffington and to complete important work on the Cavalry Division. During this period he also began to look ahead to India. He arranged details regarding his staff and briefed himself on problems he would encounter at Simla. Some of the information he received had an ominous quality:

Mr. Azziz-Uddin . . . in Criminal Intelligence Department lunched. His experience in 34 years of British service is 'Fraud triumphs'. He attributes unrest and secret societies in India to Curzon--thinks Lord Kitchener a 'fraud'. Stated in a month assassinations would begin in England and India, possibly Curzon.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 27 April 1909, (I/2).

<sup>2</sup>Dairy, 13 November 1909.

Haig noted this information, and made special efforts to find out as much as possible about the Intelligence network at Simla.

An important matter requiring Haig's attention was that of a suitable replacement at the DSD. He felt it was imperative that someone be found who could be trusted to uphold his established principles. He sought advice from Kiggell, with whom he had often worked closely at the DSD. The correspondence between Haig and Kiggell (though only the former's letters survive) provides valuable insight into their particular relationship and also into Haig's treatment of subordinates. Ten years earlier, Haig had been the protégé, while French and Wood were his patrons. By 1909 he had advanced to the stage where his old mentors were either retired or had become competitors for high appointment. Haig, in consequence, shifted from protégé to patron. His close associates, for the rest of his career, were subordinates who were dependent upon him for recognition, and upon whom he depended for support, devotion, loyalty and admiration.

Kiggell was eventually chosen to become DSD. It does not appear that this was Haig's original intention. He first asked only for advice:

. . . it is so important to get a suitable man to replace me here, that I am anxious to have your ideas as to a likely officer . . .<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that Kiggell, in reply, congratulated Haig quite profusely on his appointment. This prompted the usual false modesty from Haig. 'I confess that I wish I possessed half "the value" at which you estimate me!'<sup>2</sup> The depth of Kiggell's admiration and the similarity of their views soon convinced Haig that Kiggell was the

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 24 April 1909, (I/1).

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 27 April 1909, (I/2).



suitable replacement. 'If I can only arrange to get you here, while I am C of S in India', he wrote on 18 May, 'we might do much towards creating the beginnings of an Imperial General Staff.'<sup>1</sup> Haig needed someone who he could trust to be of like mind and who would be open to advice. Kiggell fit these requirements very well. He was as enthusiastic as Haig on the subject of military reform and, perhaps equally important, as conservative as Haig with regard to cavalry matters. 'I am very eager that you should succeed me here in order to ensure continuity', Haig wrote; adding 'not to mention that you are the best man for the job.'<sup>2</sup>

Kiggell, a man of evidently low self-esteem, doubted that he was indeed the 'best man'. This was perhaps all the better for Haig, who usually preferred the self-effacing sycophant to the brash opportunist. It was not difficult to convince Kiggell that he was suitable. 'I don't agree with your views on Brigadier Kiggell', he wrote on 21 May, 'nor do you correctly value the importance of "continuity"'. Haig continued:

I agree that it would be well that DSD should be a Major General but then the officer who is selected should be promoted--not a less qualified man selected because of his rank!!<sup>3</sup>

Haig finally persuaded Kiggell to take the post. He described the selection as a 'triumph for ability and honesty over incapacity and intrigue'. With virtue triumphant, he concluded that he had 'great hope for the future of the General Staff'.<sup>4</sup> He could feel safe about leaving the War Office.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 18 May 1909, (I/3).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 21 May 1909, (I/4).

<sup>4</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 3 July 1909, (I/5).

Haig arrived in Bombay on 22 October 1909. Though far removed from the War Office, his attentions did not long stray from matters there. He sent fortnightly letters of great length to Kiggell. Although these letters consisted mostly of advice and suggestions pertaining to Kiggell's duties as DSD, Kiggell treated them as something just short of commands. This was probabaly what Haig wanted. In July 1910, Haig was faced with the possible loss of his valuable collaborator. Kiggell was offered the post of Commandant of the Staff College. Indications are that he was eager to take it. Haig's reaction--a combination of firmness and flattery--is revealing:

On no account should you go to the Staff College. The development of the General Staff will be thrown back for many years if you leave your present job now.

Besides with as many talkers at W.O.--Aldershot--Camberley and elsewhere who know not what war really is, nor Clausewitz' fundamentals, the whole show may be wrecked unless you are in a responsible position and able to put a stopper in the windbag's mouths! I already see from your discussion at the Staff College Conference a tendency to split hairs, and a desire for precise rules to guide officers in every conceivable situation in war. This wants watching. Only a man of character like yourself can produce the right corrective. . . . But you must remain where you can insist on principles of employment of the Army being thoroughly sound.<sup>1</sup>

Though it meant passing up a valuable appointment, Kiggell agreed to stay.<sup>2</sup>

A frequent topic of Haig's letters was the training of staff officers. Kiggell regularly sought advice on changes in the Staff College curriculum, which Haig gladly provided. He also asked Haig for his views on prospective candidates, some of whom Haig blackballed. When Kiggell considered reforms of the entrance exam, Haig replied in a revealing manner. The memory of 1893 was still fresh.

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 14 July 1910, (I/7).

<sup>2</sup>Kiggell later became Commandant of the Staff College on 9 October 1913.



Haig pondered whether a formal examination was even necessary. If the authorities insisted on one, then at least the mathematics portion should be dropped:

It seems to me to be almost impossible to set a simple mathematical paper without having catch questions in it. At any rate the fact remains that the mathematical examination has not been a success. Both Brathwaite and myself failed to pass the examination in mathematics in the Staff College, and neither of us have found any need for a more<sup>1</sup> thorough knowledge of mathematics than we already possess!

Though Haig's bruised ego is easily visible behind the recommendations, they were nevertheless practical. His advocacy of a system of 'competition . . . in military subjects only',<sup>2</sup> as opposed to one which included subjects like English composition and foreign languages, was wise.

With Haig absent from the War Office, the attacks upon the FSR were renewed. Haig tried to stiffen Kiggell's resistance to this evil influence with letters like the following, dated 15 June 1911:

As regards the Adjutant General's attack on Field Service Regulations . . . Taken as a whole the book is in my opinion excellent, and (given the determination to make things run smoothly) the principles being absolutely sound can be easily applied without friction! The Adjutant General should be asked to put forward his amendments for criticism, not merely by the War Office, but by the whole of the General Staff in India and the Dominions; it would cause a great deal of trouble if any change in principles were started now, and any such change ought not to be made without full discussion and the general concurrence of all concerned.<sup>3</sup>

Haig took attacks on the FSR very personally. He had worked hard to see the manual published. He repeatedly emphasised that its real value lay in its very existence. In other words, imperfect though it may have been, it was still better than no manual at all, and its complete

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 27 April 1911, (I/11).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 15 June 1911, (I/15).

abandonment would mean chaos in wartime. This meant that Haig entertained only very minor criticisms of the manual and was pained by any discussion of its total rejection.

Haig's stance was justified. The Army did not have time to scrap the manual and begin anew. But the persistence of the opposition and Haig's own stubbornness made him intransigent and at times contradictory. For instance, it has been noted how he scorned the 'windbags' at the War Office who sought 'precise rules to guide officers in every conceivable situation'. Yet Haig's approach to the staff tours he conducted in India was not measurably more flexible. As he confessed:

. . . I have tried to preach 'the doctrine' as laid down in FSR. . . . and have quoted chapter and verse so that the General Staff here may interpret the regulations in the way in which I believe is intended.<sup>1</sup>

There was a strange mixture of the dogmatic and the flexible in Haig's approach to the FSR. He encouraged flexibility as long as the boundaries of improvisation were set by him.

This point is demonstrated later in the letter to Kiggell quoted above. In it he attacked Charles a'Court Repington, Military Correspondent of The Times. Repington criticised the FSR because it did not set forth a clearly defined strategy for the employment of the B.E.F. Haig answered:

. . . I can only feel thankful that his training manual was not in the hands of our army because we must undoubtedly have achieved disaster.<sup>2</sup>

In his report on the 1911 Indian Staff Tour, Haig renewed the attack upon Repington and his followers:

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 13 July 1911, (I/18).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Repington was, incidentally, one of Haig's closest allies on the issue of the lance.



Certain critics of the British General Staff and of our regulations have recently argued that a doctrine is lacking. . . . the critics urge that the British General Staff hesitates to teach and to publish a clear line of action. The reason seems to be that unless some such definite doctrine is decided and inculcated in time of peace, action in war will be hesitating and mistakes will be made. The critics seem to lose sight of the true nature of war, and of the varied conditions under which the British Army may have to take the field. It is neither necessary nor desirable that we should go further than what is clearly laid down in our regulations. If we go further, we run the risk of tying ourselves by a doctrine that may not always be applicable and we gain nothing in return.<sup>1</sup>

Haig continually emphasised that 'with our normal Army of 6 Divisions we must try to have a little generalship.'<sup>2</sup> He correctly grasped that British strategy would be determined largely by the actions of Germany and France. Britain had to be the wily improviser. Haig's appreciation of this fact was undoubtedly wise.

The wisdom in the above argument is, however, misleading. It must be remembered that with Haig there was often a separation of principles and practice. As will be shown in the epilogue, though Haig expressed the need for flexibility in 1911, this does not necessarily mean that flexibility characterised his approach to command from 1916-1918. This is an assumption which Terraine mistakenly makes. For instance, he comments on the 1911 staff tour as follows:

The tactical flexibility (not to be confused with strategic opportunism) became Haig's settled view. When war broke out, he had not departed from it by one jot. India was, in truth, the finishing school of his military education.<sup>3</sup>

It is likewise imprecise to call Haig's Indian tour of duty 'the finishing school of his military education'. The statement suggests

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Haig, 'Report on the 1911 Staff Tour held by the Chief of the General Staff, India', Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 85, (no page numbers are provided).

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 13 July 1911, (I/18).

<sup>3</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: the Educated Soldier, p. 49.

successes which did not actually occur. A few sentences in a staff tour report should not be treated as indicative of twenty-six months' service. Terraine mistakenly relied heavily on the Charteris biography in his treatment of this portion of Haig's career. Charteris' book, though valuable as a whole, is faulty for two reasons. The first is that Charteris wrote almost entirely from memory. He did not have access to the Haig Papers nor to the correspondence of Haig's contemporaries. His accounts of specific conversations, which Terraine often quotes verbatim, are not reliable. The second fault arises from Charteris' purpose. He aimed to enhance the image of a man whom he, most of the time, blindly admired. As a result, he exaggerated Haig's successes and ignored or glossed over his occasional failures.

The evidence in the diaries and the letters to Kiggell indicates that, while Haig was in India, disappointment and failure overshadowed success. It must be emphasised at the outset that Haig's failures in India arose not from personal shortcomings, but from the impossibility of achieving significant progress under the inefficient and disorganised system of military administration which existed in the country at the time. He failed at goals which were impossible to achieve. Haig was nevertheless not one to admit failure. In his blackest moments he consistently claimed that he could see progress being made. 'The work here', he wrote on 18 May 1911, 'is very interesting and progress in many ways apparent and so cheering.'<sup>1</sup> But while in India, statements like this--in contrast to earlier periods--were rare. This statement was in fact made after Haig's spirits were buoyed by the confirmation of his early return

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 18 May 1911, (I/13).



to Britain. Underneath the surface the situation was not bright. It must be remembered that Haig went to India with two goals. The first was to develop the Indian General Staff according to the format established by Haig as DSD. The second goal was to put the Indian Army on a war footing. The Army had always served a peacekeeping function. It was designed to control the incessant internal quarrels which characterised Imperial India. Haig wanted to direct the focus from the internal function toward India's responsibility vis a vis the safety of the Empire within the world picture. He had bold plans for India's contribution in what he now regarded as the inevitable European war.

Haig's achievements in both areas fell far short of his hopes. The reason for this failure was the monolithic obstructions referred to above which were built into the Indian military bureaucracy. Those who had long operated within this system did not appreciate outsiders eager for change. Haig soon found that he was one against many and, as such, quite powerless. Even Creagh, who had promised to help him 'oust the rascals', in fact turned out to be one of the rascals. As Marshall-Cornwall points out, Creagh was a veteran of forty years' service in the Indian Army. He 'by no means approved of all the reforms instituted by his ruthless predecessor'<sup>1</sup>--i.e. Kitchener. Haig had earlier supported Kitchener and now sought to extend his reforms. He and Creagh were therefore destined to disagree.

Haig was struck not by Creagh's recalcitrance, but by his general weakness of character:

. . . the C. in C. wishes to oblige the Viceroy because the latter is so agreeable to him, and says that he (the Chief) should not pay house rent but that his residences should be

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<sup>1</sup>Marchall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, pp. 77-78.

furnished and kept up like that of a Lord Governor of 'a Province! So you see there is much need for the 'reasoned opinion' on the General Staff to counteract these evil influences.<sup>1</sup>

When his appointment to the Aldershot Command was confirmed in late 1911, Haig predicted what effect his departure would have:

. . . I expect the Viceroy and the C. in C. will be glad when I cease to be CGS here. The Viceroy is not at all pleased with the lines taken in the G.S. memo . . . and the poor C. in C. is under the influence of us both, and has consequently given contrary opinions from time to time!<sup>2</sup>

Within such an environment, there was little that Haig could accomplish. Charteris indicates that he tried to reform the 'canonisation of duality' which he saw as the problem of the Indian system.<sup>3</sup> He suggested wide-ranging administrative reforms designed to streamline the system in a manner similar to that which had been implemented in Britain. But in Britain he was surrounded by men of like mind to his own. With the opposite the case in India, he failed. By himself, he achieved only a few insignificant changes. Terraine excuses these failures by claiming that 'his real work lay elsewhere, in guiding the minds of officers towards the problem of fighting a European enemy.'<sup>4</sup> This is simply not true. It cannot be denied that administrative reform of the Indian General Staff was one of Haig's stated priorities. This made his inability to achieve reform all the more disappointing to him.

Without the desired administrative reforms, 'guiding the minds of officers in India' became an extremely difficult task. For instance, when Haig tried to devise plans for mobilising the Indian Army in the

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 29 June 1911, (I/16).

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 29 September 1911, (I/24).

<sup>3</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 47.



event of war against a European enemy, the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, intervened and ordered Haig to destroy the plans.<sup>1</sup> Though Haig's staff tours were successful (according, at least, to him), in other areas he was frustrated by his inability to improve the staff training system:

General Wapshare and 2 of his staff came to fetch us at 8 a.m. and drive to cavalry school.

We walked around school before breakfast.

Am much annoyed at way in which all work is held up, and keenness of staff dampened by delay in issuing Army Order authorising opening of School. Delay is due to the opposition on the part of Sir R. Scallon (Sec'y Army Dept.) and Financial Department (Fleetwood Wilson).<sup>2</sup>

A few days later Haig expressed his irritation with cavalry officers who had 'forgotten to look to parade slates from War point of view.'

In this area, there had been a regression from the standards he remembered: 'When I.G. Cavalry I was very attentive to these points.'<sup>3</sup>

Reflection upon his previous tour of duty also resulted in the following complaint:

Rode with Wapshare to the 2nd Lancers lines . . . A very senior lot of officers. Much the same as when I inspected 5 or 6 years ago. Major Maxwell, Pritchard etc. in same rank! . . . Difficulty to have efficiency in the I. A. with such slow promotion.<sup>4</sup>

There was very little which Haig found to praise in his diaries or letters to Kiggell. India was a backwater, and there was little Haig could do to alter this fact. He was forced to lower the expectations

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<sup>1</sup>See Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 61. Both Terraine and Marshall Cornwall refer to this affair and emphasise the encouragement Haig gave to his subordinates to disobey the Viceroy's directives. But the only source for this is Charteris and no other verification is available.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 20 August 1910.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 22 August 1910.

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 31 March 1911.

he had formed before leaving Britain.

Another problem which worried Haig was the precarious loyalty of the Indian soldier. The reminder of the Mutiny was as fresh as ever. Haig recorded some random notes on this subject not long before he left India:

We have reverted to the conditions which prevailed when John Lawrence spoke of safety rather than power as the primary requirement of the Army in India.

At present Army's special function is as a reserve of the forces of law and order. It being a mercenary Army its loyalty must be bought and cannot be presumed.

Danger of sweating the Indian Army in the cause of military efficiency.

Danger of giving Sikhs a partial monopoly of military service.<sup>1</sup>

If it is considered that one of Haig's stated goals was to re-direct the focus of the Indian Army, the above is proof that he was unable to do so. His diaries and letters show that towards the end of his tour questions of internal stability occupied the greater part of his attention.

Haig did institute a number of significant policies designed to ensure the loyalty of the Indian soldier. He described these to Kiggell on 31 August 1911:

In the Indian Army we have not only to train officers for war but also how to keep the mercenaries loyal! We are therefore sending an officer from Headquarters to Division occasionally to explain what is going on at a meeting of the G.O.C. and C.O.s of the Indian units. From what I hear the ignorance of some of the old officers regarding the various Indian societies and what has been going on for years is remarkable. We are also arranging for a certain number of regimental officers to tour the districts from which they recruit to get to know the Indians of some importance and also the civil officials. The latter must work hand in hand with the soldier now in order to combat the enemy who is already in the field you may say. I think the General Staff has made a good beginning . . . in meet[ing] the internal enemy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 17 August 1911.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 3 August 1911, (I/22).



This was a more progressive method of dealing with the mercurial loyalty of the Indian soldier than had existed prior to Haig's arrival. He must be given credit for wisely realising that it was easier to ensure stability through understanding than through coercion.

It has already been shown how Haig's letters to Kiggell present a fresh picture of his Indian tour of duty. The disappointment which he felt apparently caused him to look outward, in two main directions. One area upon which he focused his attention was the Middle East, specifically with regard to German intentions there. Haig believed that the Germans had by 1911 accepted British naval supremacy. This caused them to focus upon 'weakening us on land first of all with a view to obtaining sea supremacy eventually'.<sup>1</sup> He described how this would happen in a letter to Kiggell dated 5 April 1911:

I see [Germany] has got the concession to connect the Baghdad line with the Syrian railways. . . . She can now threaten Egypt when the time comes. Her next step will be to squeeze Persia and so threaten Afghanistan and India. . . . Personally it seems to me that Germany's objectives should be to threaten India and cause us as much trouble and expense in this country as possible. Also go for Egypt. Curry favour with Japan so as to make us detach and reduce the fleet in Home Waters to such a size as she can tackle. Then she might occupy the low countries . . .<sup>2</sup>

Haig's predictions corresponded in theory at least to the policies Germany eventually pursued. He never underestimated German intentions or power. This was the area in which he was most politically astute. He criticised men like Hardinge who were not equally prescient: 'I fear few of our diplomats . . . realise what German power is . . .'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 5 April 1911, (I/8).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

This fear made him increasingly eager to return home. His early return was the other focus of concern in the letters to Kiggell. He did not want to be caught in India when the confrontation began. As he wrote on 18 May 1911:

. . . the situation at home is more important at the present time than India and I shall be glad to be close at hand to discuss personally, the many important questions which may be under consideration by the General Staff.<sup>1</sup>

This was a significant departure from his earlier letters in which he justified his presence in India. The first mention of an early return to Britain occurred on 5 April 1911, when Haig was only halfway through his term of service:

I much appreciate the friendly remarks about myself and what you want me to become in the near future. I am really proud of the confidence which you place in me when as you know you did all the hard work for me as DSD! . . . As to going to Aldershot there are too many applicants I expect for that billet for the powers to [sic] be to think of me. In any case I have never asked for an appointment and I don't intend to begin now--besides I am full of work here and could not leave those who have most loyally supported me in difficult times for another year at least. I should then have done three training seasons out of my allotted four!<sup>2</sup>

Haig did not have to ask for the Aldershot appointment; Haldane gave it to him five weeks later. His feelings of obligation did not prevent him from leaving his loyal supporters earlier than he had planned, on 23 December 1911. He assumed the Aldershot command in the following March.

Before he left India, Haig arranged the transfer of two members of his personal staff--Captains H. D. Baird and John Charteris. The arrival of these two men at Aldershot was pejoratively referred to as the 'Hindu Invasion' by the regular 1st Corps staff who resented

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 18 May 1911, (I/13).

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 5 April 1911, (I/8).



the intrusion. Haig's action is an example of his contradictory attitudes toward the staff. At the DSD, he worked to rid the system of patronage. He sought professionalisation through a system of promotion based on merit and experience. He tried to make sure that graduates of the Staff College were rewarded with valuable staff positions. Yet there is again the divorce of principles and practice. Neither Baird nor Charteris had p.s.c.s. They had very little staff experience, and had spent the majority of their careers in India. They appear to have been chosen simply for their ability to get on well with their superior.

The Haig-Charteris relationship deserves special examination because of the light it sheds on Haig's character, methods of command and attitude toward subordinates. On first inspection, Charteris seems antithetical to Haig's conception of the perfect staff officer. As Charteris himself maintained, Haig had 'an aversion for the hard-bitten man and [a] fondness for Caesar's fat counsellors';<sup>1</sup> he preferred quiet malleable gentleman of 'average intelligence'. Charteris was brash, outspoken, impolite, unkempt<sup>2</sup> and of considerable intellect. But he was above all loyal, to the extent that he sometimes placed loyalty to Haig over loyalty to the truth.<sup>3</sup> Like Haig, Charteris

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<sup>1</sup> John Charteris, At G.H.Q., (London: Cassell, 1931), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to his wife dated 7 April 1915, Haig referred to Charteris as 'dirty and fat'. See Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 141. There are similar comments in other letters to Lady Haig.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of this tendency will be given in the epilogue, but it is well to relate the incident when Charteris tried to raise Haig's temporarily low spirits by taking him to a prisoner of war camp so that he could see the poor condition of the German soldiers there. Charteris made sure all the able-bodied prisoners were removed prior to the visit. The trick was also played on Lloyd George. While documentary proof for the story cannot be found it is mentioned often enough to give it a fair measure of plausibility. See K. Strong, Men of Intelligence, (London: Cassell, 1970), p. 28; H. Gough, The

placed a high value on staff harmony. He could antagonise 'those outwith the staff, but was otherwise one of Haig's 'band of brothers'. Haig recognised these qualities in Charteris. The fact that he could ignore Charteris' annoying habits and traits in the interest of loyalty and harmony is the best proof of how important these qualities were to Haig.

The circumstances of their first meeting provide additional insight into the Haig-Charteris relationship. Charteris, a Royal Engineer, was supervising the construction of a pontoon bridge. Haig, on one of his tours of inspection as CGS, consulted with Charteris on the details of the work. He received a crisp and lucid account. Though Haig was not scientifically minded, it will be remembered that he did enjoy observing and recording technical processes. Charteris' eloquence no doubt impressed the inarticulate Haig.

Soon after this meeting, Charteris was found a place on Haig's personal staff at Simla.<sup>1</sup> They discovered that they shared a fascination for detail and an ability to effect order out of chaos. Their relationship consequently grew. Charteris remained at Haig's side until early 1918 when pressure from the War Office and Lloyd George resulted in his dismissal. His responsibilities went far beyond the standard ones of a staff officer. Haig relied on Charteris in all affairs, whether personal or professional.<sup>2</sup> Their relationship

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Fifth Army, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 211; and Lloyd George War Memoirs, p. 1316.

<sup>1</sup>The source of this information is Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, pp. 81-82, though no dates are given.

<sup>2</sup>During the Great War, for instance, Haig sent Charteris home to sell his automobile and to help Lady Haig move out of Government House, Aldershot. Haig also sent Charteris to the Balkans at the start of the 1912 Balkan War, but Charteris was soon ordered home by a rather perturbed War Office.



was always symbiotic. Charteris was Haig's private secretary, A.D.C., moral support, guardian, confidant and friend. He provided Haig with companionship, loyalty, reassurance and, perhaps most important, a sense of his own superiority. Charteris accepted his status as Haig's 'principal boy' and apparently enjoyed the teasing from Haig which went along with this role.<sup>1</sup> He thrived within his position of social and professional subservience. Haig was his hero, and there is no doubt that Charteris made this clear. In return, Charteris was allowed to bask in the reflected light of his exalted superior.

Haig's period at Aldershot was the brief calm before the storm. He had risen to the highest troop command in the British Army, and yet was only fifty years old. Despite his relatively late start in the Army, he had been promoted past all his contemporaries in age. This must have given him immense satisfaction. Equally satisfying was the fact that India, with all its disturbing backwardness, was comfortably behind him. He was back in Britain, where he could patiently await the inevitable. Charteris describes Haig's Elysium as follows:

For the first time in his married life he was settled in a real home. Government House, if not palatial, was spacious, and in those pre-war days it stood in country surroundings. Happy in the reunion with his family, Haig set himself to the just admixture of the life of a serving officer and a country gentleman.<sup>2</sup>

Haig golfed, hunted, fished and generally kept active. He participated in the most prestigious of social functions. He again visited

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<sup>1</sup>Esher was one of many to refer to Charteris as the 'principal boy'. See Esher to Haig, 21 October 1916, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 214(f). In the previously-quoted 7 April 1915 letter to his wife, Haig described the many April Fools jokes which he and his staff had played on Charteris. Lady Haig, in The Man I Knew, relates similar incidents when Charteris was the brunt of some rather childish jokes (See p. 108).

<sup>2</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 64.

fortune tellers and mediums who predicted nothing but success and glory. There was fulfilment in his life which, when combined with his usually immense self-satisfaction, brought him serenity.

The Aldershot command was composed of the 1st and 2nd Divisions and the 1st Cavalry Brigade. Upon mobilisation, this force was to become the 1st Corps of the B.E.F. When still in India, Haig commented upon his future assignment in a letter to Kiggell:

I had a very nice letter from Lord Haldane last mail . . . He . . . said that he thought there was a good deal to be done at Aldershot. I am glad at this as I should feel nervous at taking over the command in 'absolute efficiency'.<sup>1</sup>

Haig made 'absolute efficiency' his goal. It was the type of task for which he was naturally suited. He was interested in every aspect of the command, including, significantly, the budding air arm. But, as always, a disproportionate amount of attention was paid to his beloved cavalry. It is not necessary to elucidate all the minor tasks in which Haig engaged in order to prepare his command for war. The proud record of the 1st Corps during the opening months of the Great War is sufficient testimony to Haig's success as organiser, educator, trainer and commander.

The Aldershot Corps received its first significant test in the autumn of 1912. Large scale manoeuvres--more ambitious than any previously held--took place in East Anglia. Haig's 1st Corps, the 'Red Force', was pitted against the 2nd Corps, or 'Blue Force', commanded by Lieutenant General Sir James Grierson. Haig was reinforced by Allenby's Cavalry Division, which gave him numerical superiority. Haig played the role of the European invader, while Grierson was scripted to fall back for the defence of London. Through the superior

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 29 June 1911, (I/16).



use of his air arm, Grierson cleverly out-manoevred Haig, and was generally agreed the winner.

After the manoeuvres, a conference was held in the Great Hall of Trinity College, Cambridge. The commanders were supposed to explain and discuss their actions and outline the lessons to be learned. Haig, never adept at self-expression, foolishly abandoned his prepared speech and attempted to extemporise. According to Charteris,

. . . he became totally unintelligible and unbearably dull. The University dignitaries soon fell fast asleep. Haig's friends became more and more uncomfortable; only he himself seemed totally unconscious of his failure.<sup>1</sup>

Charteris was right; Haig did not notice the effect of his speech.

He described the event in his diary:

I am called first to explain my operation as C. in C. of Red Force. I think my remarks well received. Grierson followed. Then French. His criticisms especially on the strategic value of Cambridge were not much thought of.<sup>2</sup>

Haig's clumsiness in verbal communication produced some amusing anecdotes,<sup>3</sup> but was otherwise not important. It should not distract attention from two significant issues to arise from the 1912 manoeuvres. One was the way Grierson had more readily grasped the importance and utility of a technological innovation. Delay in this area proves costly in wartime, when technological progress always increases in speed. The second point concerns the comment regarding French. Neither the comment itself nor the issue was particularly

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 19 September 1912.

<sup>3</sup>The best one is when Haig congratulated the winners of an inter-regimental cross-country race by saying 'You have run very well. I hope you will run as well in the presence of the enemy.' The source is, again, Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 65, and is therefore open to question.

important. It is, however, significant as an indicator of the rift which was developing between Haig and French.

This rift widened as a result of the Curragh Mutiny which exploded from the Anglo-Irish troubles in March 1914. Home Rule, passed in January 1913, was due to be enforced in June 1913. Protestant Ulster, opposed to the bill, organised a force which by March numbered 100,000 men, of whom half were armed. Violence seemed certain. Military action seemed the only legitimate response. The problem was complicated by the fact that many senior officers were Ulstermen who were actively opposed to Home Rule. Faced with this perplexing situation, the Secretary of State for War, J. E. B. Seely, and the CIGS, Sir John French, summoned the commander of the forces in Ireland, Sir Arthur Paget, to London. Their meeting, also attended by the Adjutant General Sir Spencer Ewart, resulted in a confusion over the correct policy to pursue. Paget subsequently went back to Ireland and, taking matters somewhat into his own hands, explained to his officer corps that in the event of a clash with the Ulster Volunteers, officers from Ulster would be given leave of absence for the duration. All other officers, Paget maintained, would have to fight or resign.

Brigadier General Hubert Gough, commander of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, stationed in Ireland, was born in Ulster. He was not, however, able to benefit from Paget's 'escape clause' because he was not at that time an Ulster resident. Since he could not countenance fighting his countrymen, he chose immediate resignation. Fifty-eight of his subordinate officers followed his example.<sup>1</sup> Suddenly, with war on the horizon, the officer corps of the British Army was in danger of disintegration.

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<sup>1</sup>There were, in all, seventy officers in Gough's brigade.



Haig was golfing with Lady Haig at Littlehampton when the crisis exploded. News of it reached him via the following letter from his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General John Gough, Hubert's brother, dated 20 March 1914:

My dear General:

This afternoon I received a telegram from Hubert 'Have been offered dismissal service or undertake operations against Ulster' and ending up 'have accepted the first contingency'.

You know my views which mean everything to me. I wired back to Hubert 'I will not fight against Ulster if you are dismissed, my resignation goes in at once'.

I told General Lomax that I was going to London to see if it was true Hubert was to be dismissed and if a fact to resign my commission.

So far I have only been in telephone communication with Sir J. French and Seely's private sec'y and I gather that there may have been a mistake. So I will go to the War Office tomorrow morning and find out for certain and then act according to my conscience.

It is only right that I should keep you informed of what I have done and will let you know the result of my War Office visit.

Yrs. sincerely,  
J. Gough<sup>1</sup>

Haig responded with the following telegram:

Hope you will not act precipitately I feel equally strong on the subject as you there is no question of Army fighting against Protestants or against Catholics our duty is to keep the peace between them.<sup>2</sup>

Haig aimed to save the Army, his command and his own career, all of which were threatened by the Curragh crisis. The above telegram is the first indicator of the intentionally vague approach which Haig was to take throughout the crisis. He certainly could not have felt 'equally strong on the subject' as Gough, who was willing to sacrifice his career. Nor did he make it clear how the Army was

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<sup>1</sup> John Gough to Haig, 20 March 1914, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 91(a). All Curragh correspondence is from this file.

<sup>2</sup> Haig to J. Gough, telegram, 21 March 1914.

to 'keep the peace' without risking violence against Ulster'. This intentional equivocation (a talent perhaps learned at the War Office) eventually enabled Haig to slip through the crisis completely unscathed. On this particular occasion it had the desired effect. Gough replied that he had given his resignation to Seely's secretary but had asked that it be held until the future was more certain. Haig had shrewdly prevented the loss of a valuable member of his staff.

Haig returned to London the next day and urged Haldane to use his influence to calm the crisis. Though Haldane was essentially powerless, he did make a speech in the House of Lords on the 25th in which he claimed that the Government had made no plans to use the Army to coerce Ulster. This did not soothe the disgruntled officers and only embarrassed the Government. At the same time the Cabinet drafted a document which declared that the incident was a misunderstanding and that the resignations of Gough and his men would not be accepted. The document disingenuously added that all British officers had to obey the orders of the Army Council. Hubert Gough, pushed this far, was not prepared to accept something so inconclusive. He demanded a guarantee that he would not be called upon to fight. Seely, French and Ewart, in a private meeting called without the knowledge of the Prime Minister, amended the original Cabinet document to include this guarantee.

When Asquith learned of the amended document, he was furious. The affair implied that his ministry was so weak that it had to make deals with its Army officers on the conditions of their service. More important, the assurance given to Gough was a slap in the face for the Southern Irish, who took it as proof that the Government was not prepared to enforce Home Rule. In response to this embarrassment, Asquith demanded that Seely, French and Ewart repudiate the



amendment or resign. All three chose the latter. French explained why in a letter to Haig:

My dear Haig:

The Adjutant General and I have resigned our appointments and our resignations have been accepted by the Govt. The issue was a purely personal one, absolutely unconnected with any political consideration whatever. We should not have taken the step if we had not been quite confident that all officers, non-commissioned officers and men would continue to carry out their duties in the same loyal and whole-hearted manner which has ever characterised the Army.

I feel confident, therefore, that I may rely upon you to maintain discipline at the same high standard as heretofore and to allay and remove by your own influence any feeling which may exist in regard to what has recently occurred.

Yrs. sincerely,  
J. D. P. French<sup>1</sup>

With Seely, French and Ewart gone, the Cabinet could save face. The amendment was subsequently repudiated, but quietly allowed to stand as far as Gough was concerned.

Haig's attitude toward the Curragh crisis was expressed in his diary the day before French resigned:

At 12 o.c. I held meeting of G.O.C.s of Divisions and Brigades--about 14 present. Pointed out danger of disruption in Army to Empire and begged them to induce regular officers to give up dabbling in politics. We were all united to do anything required short of coercing our fellow citizens who have done no wrong.<sup>2</sup>

The contradiction in the last sentence is conspicuous. Terraine notes it, and quoting Robert Blake, explains that Haig had not himself found 'an easy escape from the conflict of loyalties.'<sup>3</sup> This is partially true, but it is more accurate to see the statement as a continuation of the approach taken in the telegram to John Gough.

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<sup>1</sup>French to Haig; the date of this letter is unintelligible, but it was probably written on 26 March 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Diary 25 March 1914.

<sup>3</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 65.

The rather flimsy assurances given by Haig echo those of Haldane in the House of Lords. Both statements satisfied their audiences but were not intended to be tested. It is rather ironic that while Haig was cautioning his men not to dabble in politics, he was using 'political' tactics to handle the crisis. He was giving his men the concrete assurances they required while at the same time hoping that his bluff would not be called.

Haig's efforts were directed at preserving the cherished integrity and prestige of the officer corps, particularly that of the cavalry. He felt that Asquith and Seely were to blame for the crisis and wanted to ensure the British public continued to feel the same. He was determined that odium and blame should not be cast upon the Army. To avoid such a catastrophe, it was necessary to steer a clear course between those groups who opposed the use of the Army to coerce Ulster and those who felt it was the Army's duty to enforce the will of the Government. French's resignation destroyed the hope of finding such a course. Haig correctly perceived that the resignation would be seen not as 'a purely personal matter', as French had maintained, but as an acceptance of blame. Haig felt that French had weakly agreed to carry a burden of guilt which rightfully belonged to Asquith. The Government had squeaked through, while the reputation of the Army had been tarnished. French's mistake was so severe that Haig never forgave him. On 13 October 1916, the occasion of a visit by French to the Western Front, Haig wrote the following to Rothschild:

As F. is a British F.M., I sent a guard of honour and an A.D.C. to receive him, and say that if he wished to visit the British battlefront arrangements would be made. He wisely I think decided not to come to the British Army. Many of us do not forget . . . how he sacrificed the whole Army during the Irish crisis before the war.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Leopold de Rothschild, 13 October 1916, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 214(a).



Haig added that he doubted whether many officers would be 'at all keen to welcome [French] if he had come back'.<sup>1</sup> Haig's attitude is illustrated by a comparison of his treatment of French and Hubert Gough. Gough's resignation was over a matter of principle and honour; it therefore was seen by Haig to uphold the integrity of the officer corps. Haig subsequently harboured no ill-feeling toward Gough over the crisis. The same held true for John Gough who remained one of Haig's most valued assistants, until his death in the early months of the war. French, on the other hand, had shown himself to be weak and easily manipulated. Haig as a result scorned him, and the rift between the once-close officers became permanent.

In the late spring of 1914, the Curragh affair drifted slowly into the background, though it permanently scarred the Army. Besides dividing men like French and Haig, it left the Army as a whole with a bitter distrust of the Liberal Party. But the officer corps at least survived intact, if somewhat bruised. These men devoted the spring and summer to the fine-tuning for war. The pre-war calm which has been noted by so many of the 1914 generation was evident even in the Army. Haig's diary demonstrates this false calm. The frenzy of the previous years had abated. Between the Curragh crisis and mobilisation, there are hardly any entries. Those that exist are short, unspectacular and mostly concerned with non-military matters. It was as if the serious preparation for war was complete, and the combatants were content to sit and wait for an issue over which to fight.

When the issue came, few immediately recognised its importance. Charteris claims that Haig was alarmed by the assassination of the

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Rothschild, 13 October 1916.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 18 June, and ordered his staff to study its implications.<sup>1</sup> This is probably true, but the diary does not bear out this urgency. The assassination is not even mentioned. Nor do the entries which follow that of 28 June show any of the same concern which Haig displayed during the Agadir Crisis or the 1912 and 1913 Balkan Wars. The details of how a world war arose from the relatively insignificant murder of a European monarch need not be recounted here. Before long, events assumed a momentum of their own. On 1 August, France and Germany ordered their mobilisations. Britain began hers three days later.

On 4 August--the first day of British mobilisation--Haig wrote an urgent letter to Haldane. In response to the popular appeal to appoint Kitchener the Secretary of State for War, Haig commented as follows:

. . . I make so bold as to write that you will, even at great personal inconvenience, return to the War Office for as long as war lasts and preparations are necessary. No one knows the details of the problems of organisation as you do! This war will last many months, possibly years, so I venture to hope that our only bolt (and that not a very big one) may not suddenly be shot on a project of which the success seems to me quite doubtful--I mean the checking of the German advance into France. Would it not be better to begin at once to enlarge our Expeditionary Force by amalgamating less regular forces with it? In three months time we should have quite a considerable Army, so that when we do take the field we can act decisively and dictate terms which will ensure a lasting peace.

I presume, of course, that France can hold out even though her forces have to fall back from the frontier for the necessary time for us to create an army of 300,000.

Forgive me for bothering you with a letter, but I do see great advantages for the Empire of having you at the War Office at this time . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Haldane, 4 August 1914, Haldane Papers, NLS, Ms. 5910, ff. 251.



Haig felt the worry of a father whose only son was going off to war. The B.E.F. belonged to him and Haldane. He was disturbed that its fate was now in the hands of men neither familiar with it nor sympathetic to its spirit. Haig's experience of Kitchener had taught him that he was not the organisational genius which many thought him to be. In a postscript, he again exhorted Haldane to return to the War Office. 'We have a mass of undeveloped power which no one knows better than yourself how to organise and control',<sup>1</sup> he ended.

Haig's experiences in the Boer War are easily visible behind the recommendations to Haldane. In South Africa, Haig saw how the early momentum was given to the Boers because the British began with a force which was not ready for war. This meant that the British could not dictate the peace even after an apparent victory was gained with the capture of Pretoria. But Haig did not immediately realise that circumstances were decidedly different in 1914. The British were not dealing with a small, untrained Boer army, but a huge, finely-tuned German force which had to be met immediately. Haig's letter reveals an astonishing political blindness. The idea of waiting for the formation of a 300,000-strong army, though perhaps wise in theory was formed in a political vacuum. Haig did not consider the effect upon the French that a delay would produce. For three months, France would have had to bear the brunt of the German attack alone. Though the B.E.F. did not promise much of a physical effect in countering this attack, it did promise a psychological one. And, while Haig was prescient in predicting a long war, he did not extend this prescience to a consideration of the effect an occupying

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<sup>1</sup>Haig to Haldane, 4 August 1914.

force deep within the French frontier for this period of time would have upon the morale of the population. The ignorance of these considerations by a general who placed such great emphasis upon morale factors is inexplicable.

Haig soon overcame this initial blindness. Over the next ten days, he emerged as one of the wisest of counsels in Britain. This was partly due to the inadequate consideration of the realities of war which characterised British military and political leaders. There was superficial readiness--the B.E.F. was finely 'tuned and mobilisation seemed completely planned--but the deeper questions and complexities of war had not been grasped. French and Henry Wilson, for instance, would not have advised a delay of three months because neither believed that the war would last that long. The depth of British ignorance became apparent at the War Council which first met on 5 August. For the first time the detailed plans between the French and British General Staffs were revealed to the generals whose actions they governed. Yet despite the intricate plans for mobilisation and for cooperation with the allies, the immediate consequence of real war was chaos. This was due to a lack of flexibility on the part of the planners. The B.E.F. was supposed to concentrate behind the French left at Maubeuge. From there the force was to take up the left flank. Mobilisation plans had been formulated according to this design. But because the British mobilised three days later than the Germans and French, a concentration at this point became too dangerous. There was no contingency plan. It was up to the War Council to develop one rapidly.

At the War Council confusion reigned. Ideas for the use of the B.E.F.--most of them ludicrous--came from all directions. The most deluded was French, who had earlier been appointed Commander-in-Chief



of the B.E.F. His lack of understanding of the British role vis  
a vis France makes Haig's initial mistakes seem tame. French proposed taking on the full might of the German Army at Antwerp. Here, he surmised, the British could be reinforced by the Belgian and Dutch Armies (he wrongly assumed the latter to have been Allies). Haig was angry and upset by French's obvious lack of preparation for his lofty command. He wrote of the meeting in his diary:

Personally, I trembled at the reckless way Sir John French spoke about 'the advantages' of the B.E.F. operating from Antwerp against the powerful and still intact German Army! So, when it came to my turn to speak, I formulated a number of questions to bring out the risk we would run of 'defeat in detail' if we separated from the French at the outset of the campaign. 'Have we enough troops with the Belgians, to carry on a campaign independently of the French, or do we run excessive risk if we act separately, of defeat in detail?' and 'What does our General Staff know of the fighting value of the Belgian Army?'<sup>1</sup>

Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, fortunately vetoed French's proposal by stating that he could not guarantee the safe passage of the B.E.F. to Antwerp.

While he had the floor, Haig continued by outlining four additional considerations. Though these were discounted by most of those present, they turned out to be profoundly sagacious. The first consideration was that since Britain and Germany would be fighting for their existence, 'neither would acknowledge defeat after a short struggle'. Haig urged the Council to 'organise our resources for a war of several years'.<sup>2</sup> The second point was that Britain had to begin building a huge army. Haig mentioned one million men as the initial target. Thirdly, in order to train the huge force, it was necessary to withdraw some officers and N.C.O.s from the B.E.F. in order to form the vital experienced nucleus. Lastly, after being

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 5 August 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

informed of the secret arrangements with France, Haig changed his mind regarding the timing of the British effort. He urged that the largest possible portion of the B.E.F. be sent to a suitable place in France as soon as practicable. Had the wisdom of all these proposals been accepted immediately by all concerned, the character of the British war effort may have been different.

As the days sped past, Haig's confidence in French disappeared completely. Since he believed that his loyalties to his nation took precedence over those to his superior officer and one-time friend, Haig made his reservations known. From the very beginning he took steps which hastened French's downfall. On 11 August he noted that:

The King and Queen arrive at Aldershot at 12 noon . . . The King seemed delighted that Sir John French had been appointed to the Chief Command of the Expeditionary Force. He asked my opinion. I told him at once, as I felt it my duty to do so, that from my experience with Sir John in the South African War, he was certain to do his utmost loyalty to carry out any orders which the Government might give him. I had grave doubts, however, whether his temper was sufficiently even or his military knowledge sufficiently thorough to enable him to discharge properly the very difficult duties which will devolve upon him during the coming operations with the Allies on the Continent. In my own heart I know that French is quite unfit for this great command at a time of crisis in our Nation's history. But I thought it sufficient to tell the King that I had 'doubts' about the selection.<sup>1</sup>

Haig was balancing precariously on the line between duty and opportunism. Whether he stepped over the line--at this time or later in the war--continues to be a matter of some controversy.

Haig's 'grave doubts' arose from his recent disagreement with French over cavalry tactics, from the ill-feeling over the Curragh affair and from French's behaviour at the War Council. Had Haig kept to these issues, the rectitude of his actions would not be open to question. Instead, he padded his argument with 'evidence' from

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 11 August 1914.



the pre-1909 period. This was pure fabrication. It must be kept in mind that prior to 1909, Haig raised no significant complaints about French's abilities as a commander. On 13 August, however, he wrote a long entry in his diary in a tone which was obviously directed toward future generations of historians:

I . . . feel the greatest confidence that we will give a good account of ourselves, if only our Higher Command give us a reasonable chance! . . . I have an uneasy feeling lest we may be thoughtlessly committed to some great general action before we have had time to absorb our recruits. . . . This uneasy feeling which disturbs me springs, I think, from my knowledge of the personalities of which our high command is composed. I have already stated somewhat briefly my opinion of Sir John French's ability as a Commander in the Field. His military ideas often shocked me when I was his Chief of Staff during the South African War. . . .

With all this knowledge of the Chief . . . behind me, I have grave reasons for being anxious about what happens to us in the great adventure upon which we are now going to start this very night. However, I am determined to behave as I did in the South African War, to be thoroughly loyal and do my duty as a subordinate should, trying all the time to see Sir John's good qualities and not his weak ones.<sup>1</sup>

During the South African War Haig roundly criticised Kitchener, Roberts and a host of other senior officers. French, on the other hand, received nothing but praise. When French was appointed CIGS in 1911, Haig wrote that he thought this was the 'best selection'.<sup>2</sup> The validity of the above criticisms are therefore open to serious question. Haig had justifiably lost confidence in French, but it is not clear why he felt the need to maintain that this lack of confidence had roots reaching to the Boer War. He perhaps feared that, since he was French's logical successor, his actions would be seen as gross opportunism unless he demonstrated that his misgivings had existed for some time. At any rate, these fabrications cast a

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<sup>1</sup>Diary 13 August 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Kiggell, 18 May 1911, (I/13).

shadow over what is essentially a demonstration of his loyalty to the Empire and his determination to block anyone who he perceived as a threat to the Empire's safety.

On the next day, 14 August, Haig embarked for France. The mobilisation plans, at least those pertaining to embarkation, had worked so well that he had only to worry about getting himself ready. But there was never any question that he would be ready. On the 13th he wrote that 'in all my dreams I have never been so bold to imagine that, when . . . war did break out, I should hold one of the most important commands in the British Army.'<sup>1</sup> This, too, seems to have been written for future generations. Haig's humility was so rare that, when expressed, its hollowness was conspicuous. Since entering the Army thirty years before, he had advanced resolutely toward his goal of high command. With every step he took, he kept his mind finely focused on the European war which he was certain lay ahead. August 14 was the fulfilment of an ambition and, in many ways, a destiny.

His departure was in keeping with his approach to life and his approach to war. Henrietta and Willie Jameson motored from London with many bottles of the finest champagne. Haig and his personal staff joined them in the drawing room of the hotel at which they were staying. The group drank to 'success and a safe return'.<sup>1</sup> It was all very genteel. No sadness nor tears were noted. There seems to have been no awareness of the turmoil which would follow. No one seemed to sense that in four years the world this group had known, and the society that had produced Douglas Haig, the gentleman-soldier, would be forever altered. That night, Haig boarded the Connie Castle and went to war.

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 14 August 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



## EPILOGUE

The Great War

The pre-war career of Douglas Haig spanned a period of profound change in all aspects of military science. Haig embraced some of these changes, and rejected others. The obscurantist elements of his thinking, though questioned by men like Roberts and Childers, were not seriously challenged in war prior to 1914. The Sudan Campaign and the Boer War were sufficiently vague experiences for a stubborn, traditional cavalryman like Haig to interpret them as he wished. The real challenge to Haig's military beliefs came during the Great War. The fighting on the Western Front was not open to similarly wide interpretation. The Great War conclusively demonstrated that the glorious days of the cavalry were past. It made tactical conservatism costly and dangerous. It highlighted the important military and political developments of the previous century, and thus demonstrated where and how Haig's own perception had been faulty.

The aim of this thesis has been to chart Haig's development as a soldier. It has been shown how he was shaped by personal, professional and social forces. A more complete picture of Haig on the eve of war than has heretofore been available has, it is felt, been achieved. It is not necessary to continue this study with a detailed description of Haig's role in the Great War, for it seems that, by 1914, Haig's development as a soldier was virtually complete. A fitting epilogue would therefore explore the problems of command which arose in the Great War and analyse Haig's chances, based on his pre-war record, of meeting them.

As was previously mentioned, Haig began the war as 1st Corps Commander. It was in this capacity that he took part in the demoralising retreat after Mons, the inspired advance from the Marne and the inconclusive 1st Battle of Ypres. It was also as 1st Corps Commander that Haig formed his opinion of the war and how it could be



won. After the 1914 battles Haig was convinced that

. . . as soon as we were supplied with the ample ammunition of high explosive, we could walk through the German lines at several places. In my opinion the reason we were here [had not advanced] was primarily due to our want of Artillery and secondly due to our small numbers last November.<sup>1</sup>

The opinion underwent little alteration during the course of the war. The emphasis was placed firmly upon numbers, not execution.

The fighting in 1915 was as frustrating and inconclusive for Haig as for the rest of the country. In late December 1914, he had been promoted to 1st Army Commander as a result of the administrative restructuring made necessary by the huge expansion of the Army. The promotion was due more to Haig's pre-war reputation than to any wartime achievements. Perhaps the most important battle for him in this new capacity took place at Neuve-Chapelle from 10-13 March. Neuve-Chapelle was unique among Great War battles. Due primarily to a shortage of ammunition, the preliminary bombardment was kept to thirty-five minutes, one of the shortest in the war. The limited bombardment meant that surprise was maintained and, as a result, the first objectives were reached with relative ease--two more rarities in the war. A lack of reserves, however, prevented exploitation of the initial British advantage.

Neuve-Chapelle is important not for what it taught Haig, but for what he did not learn. What he should have noticed was the importance of things small: short bombardments, limited objectives, limited fronts and battles of a few days' duration. The problem of reserves clouded the recognition of these subtleties. The reaction, by Haig and by other senior commanders, was that if Neuve-Chapelle was partially successful, complete success would result from the expansion of all of its elements. Subtlety, cleverness, deception

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<sup>1</sup>Diary, 22 January 1915.

and surprise were henceforth smothered by the emphasis upon things large: lengthy bombardments, massive concentrations of men, extended fronts, unrealistic objectives and battles lasting several months.

A similar problem of manpower to that which clouded Neuve-Chapelle brought about Haig's promotion to Commander-in-Chief in late 1915. In the Battle of Loos (25 September to 8 October), Haig was prevented from exploiting an early advantage because of a shortage of reserves. It subsequently transpired that this time the extra men had been available, but that French had failed to push them forward at the opportune moment. French was placed in an embarrassing position. He foolishly reacted by denying any error. This cast Haig as the innocent victim of his superior's incompetence and duplicity. Haig astutely realised that the time had come to make his claim for French's position. He made wise use of the issues arising from the battle and effectively masked the personal squabbles which had divided him and French over the previous three years. In discussions with Kitchener, Haldane and the King, he questioned French's fitness for command, alleged that he had been wronged over Loos and subtly cast himself as the man to lead Britain to victory. The issue of national survival conveniently obscured the ambition which had always motivated Haig.

Haig's highly admired moral qualities, along with the support of his influential friends, gave him security as Commander-in-Chief to a degree which French never enjoyed. As Lloyd George eventually realised, Haig's position was virtually unassailable, to criticise him was exceedingly dangerous. The result was that the war became Haig's and the emphasis upon large-scale actions became British military policy. The Somme and Passchendaele--the longest battles in British history, involving the most men and the greatest number of



casualties--are the everlasting symbols of the Haig approach. In both battles, the first day's objectives were reached in the final months. Both began with plans of a dramatic breakthrough and ended with the weak justification that at least the Germans had suffered more. Both battles are, nevertheless, measures of Haig's courage, determination and strength of character. These qualities brought Haig and the nation through the German offensive of 1918, and later brought victory in November of the same year.

Victory in turn brought Haig an earldom, a grant of £100,000, and the estate at Bemersyde. Haig remained as dignified and quietly self-assured in peace as he had been in war. Unlike Haldane, Wilson, Lloyd George and French he made no effort to justify his war record. He apparently felt, probably with good reason, that his best defence was to maintain a stoic silence. His work with the British Legion enhanced his image of unselfishness and devotion. It is nevertheless a pity that he did not leave a record of his feelings about the war, but instead left it to others to surmise them. Part of the controversy of Haig is due to the fact that his reflections died with him on 19 January 1928.

If costs are ignored or excused, Haig's character, determination and courage seem admirable. But can the costs of Haig's megalithic battles be conveniently brushed aside? It is here that historians disagree. Few (perhaps only Dixon) seriously question his moral qualities. The disagreement instead centres on whether he is to be blamed for the enormous loss of life which took place under his command. Those who take Haig's side, among them Terraine, argue that high casualties were the unavoidable cost of victory. They praise Haig for being able to see the way to victory despite the mounting losses which damaged the resolve or distracted the attention of others.

They naturally ridicule suggestions that the war could have been won in a more economical way. Haig's critics, Dixon, Fuller and Wolff, among others, feel that the lengthy casualty lists are the symbols of his shortcomings as a military leader. They acknowledge that he achieved victory, but question its enormous cost. They readily offer detailed descriptions of a more economical way in which the war could have been won.

Both sides have focused too intensely upon numbers. The question of costs has polarised opinion to such an extent that the military realities of the war have often been misunderstood. Historians have, in a manner remarkably similar to Haig, failed to recognise the war's small alternatives--the only alternatives which in fact existed. Haig's ability to notice and exploit these alternatives is the only legitimate basis upon which his command can be judged. It is, however, first necessary to understand the restrictions which the war imposed upon Haig. In order to win, the British had to defeat the German Army. This was true wherever British forces were concentrated and in whatever order Germany's allies were met. The war also had to involve large casualties. It is foolish to believe otherwise, given the gargantuan armies and enormous firepower of the combatants. The war also had to be fought in the trenches. Static warfare was not the result of any commander's stupidity. Movement in warfare is determined by the interplay of firepower and mobility. In 1914, firepower was in the ascendancy. It was virtually impossible to move large numbers of men across a battlefield without exposing them to the deadly fire of rifles, machine guns and artillery. Mobility was further limited by the concentration of large numbers of men into relatively small, often rain-soaked, battlefields. Contrary to Haig's prognostications in Cavalry Studies, 'the future' did not give rise



to a greater role for the cavalry, but rather to the indispensability of the spade. The Western Front was, in other words, a bottleneck for which the trench was the only answer.

Strategy in the Great War was therefore severely limited because there was no escaping trench warfare. But strategic impotence meant tactical predominance. There are two basic ways to conduct a trench war. The first relies upon time--the dreadful inevitability of attrition. By itself attrition is a passive policy. It is the safe way for a numerically superior force to win a static war. If equal losses are maintained, attrition gradually meanders its way toward a favourable conclusion. The second method, which relies upon tactics, allows the commander to influence actively the course of the war. It is here that the small tactical alternatives come into play. By taking advantage of these alternatives (or, in fact, by making them) the commander can favourably alter the balance of losses. Attrition remains a factor, as it always does in a static war, but it is no longer the only factor. Risks are introduced, but the war can be shortened and lives saved.

Alternatives involving surprise, deception and subtlety have already been discussed. A detailed examination of the war would undoubtedly reveal other alternatives, specific to particular battles. In order to take full advantage of these, the commander had to be open-minded, perceptive, imaginative and adaptable. In the Great War, the German commanders seem to have exhibited these qualities to the greatest degree. This is understandable in view of the challenges which faced them. The German Army's tactical creativity resulted in part from its numerical inferiority. Tactics such as the creeping barrage, elastic defence, the use of gas and innovations in fortification were inspired by a realisation within the German Army that a

war of attrition could not be won. The Russians, on the other hand, were the least imaginative in part because they believed they had an inexhaustible supply of men. They were confident of the favourable progress of attrition and perceived no need to be creative.

The analysis of Haig's command must therefore take into account the restrictions imposed by this war and must centre upon tactics. The relevant point of contention is whether or not he displayed the tactical creativity essential to minimising losses. Was he sufficiently adaptable to adjust to the war's unique conditions and to exploit the full potential of the innovations--aeroplanes, tanks, barbed wire, gas, mechanized transport, etc.--which were used extensively for the first time in this war? If he was not sufficiently adaptable, or if he failed to perceive that a radical adjustment was necessary, does it then follow that he should be blamed for wasting British lives?

Haig's admirable courage and determination would have been of little consequence had he not commanded men of extraordinary durability. His ability to continue fighting was, more accurately, theirs. While he may have had little experience or understanding of these men, he did have an uncanny appreciation of the strains they could and would bear. It is therefore a possibility that, in a manner similar to the Russians, Haig did not feel the need to be tactically creative. He was never forced into a position where the survival of his army depended upon his ability to innovate. Confident of the resilience of his men, he may have felt safe to let attrition take its course. Since he was by nature cautious and conservative, he may not have felt comfortable trying to influence this course in any radical sort of way. This hypothesis is supported by Haig's cavalry background. The cavalry was the only arm of exploitation of which Haig had sufficient experience or in which he felt trust. Deprived of this impor-



tant tool, Haig perhaps did not search for new methods of exploitation. Instead, he may have cautiously chosen to rely on the established tactics (magnified many times) which in the past had produced opportunities for the cavalry, in the vain hope that the traditional formula would remain potent.

The argument is plausible, but it is an incomplete explanation for Haig's conduct. It also introduces an element of conscious choice; it assumes that Haig would have been able to adapt had he decided that it was necessary. This is a very big assumption. Terraine admitted that Haig lacked the 'critical mind' which would seemingly be an essential prerequisite to tactical creativity. Haig's pre-war career abounds with evidence of this deficiency. His stubborn support for traditional cavalry was in part an inability to understand the progress of military technology. His interest in scientific innovations --as his early travels in India and Australia demonstrate--seldom went beyond a superficial fascination. The 1912 manoeuvres reveal his difficulties in imagining the new tactics which innovations like the aeroplane inevitably implied. The squandering of the surprise potential of the tank on the Somme (after the battle had become futile) can be seen as a continuation of his pre-war tactical rigidity.

Haig's adaptability was probably further restricted by his unquestioning faith in certain military principles. His belief in the cavalry was not only an inability to understand progress, it was also an almost religious devotion to the offensive pattern which preceded the cavalry charge. Kimberley, and the years spent arguing with Roberts, Childers and Dundonald, had hardened this faith into dogmatism. A further study of the Great War will probably reveal that the most profound effect of the cavalry upon Haig's command was in the way it made him cling tenaciously to his sacred strategy despite its functional

irrelevance in this war. Haig's cavalry background did not cause him to send forth waves of cavalrymen against German machine-gunners. It did not even cause him to expand the cavalry, as Liddell Hart alleges.<sup>1</sup> It did, it seems, cause him to work for a breach of the enemy lines and a turning of the flank, the two steps which in the past had preceded the release of the cavalry. While this formula was not obsolete (with the tank as the mobile arm it would be reborn) it was out of place in the Great War, where a breakthrough was impossible until the latter stages. As Edmonds wrote, the Western Front was like a prolonged siege and needed to be treated as such. It was 'an artillery and engineering war and [Haig] tried to make it a cavalry war'.<sup>2</sup>

A lack of imagination and a steadfast faith in the cavalry rendered Haig tactically rigid even before the war. It can also be argued that, the above reasons aside, Haig was by nature rigid and closed-minded. Barrow confessed that he was 'as a rule intolerant of any opinion that differed from his own'.<sup>3</sup> From youth, his development had been toward pedantry and dogmatism and away from open-mindedness and tolerance. This rigidity was further tempered during the war by a change in his religious outlook. Prior to 1914, religion, though important to Haig, had not influenced his career in any perceivable way. In war, it became his most important source of strength. As

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<sup>1</sup>Liddell Hart, in his History of the First World War, p. 35, cites the fact that forage was the shipment of greatest bulk in the cross-channel transport during the war as proof of Haig's over-reliance upon the cavalry. In making this point, he disregards the fact that all transport between the distribution points and the trenches was by horse or mule. As the Army increased in size, so did the number of pack animals and the food required to feed them. The number of cavalry horses actually showed the greatest proportional decrease in relation to other components of the Army during the war.

<sup>2</sup>Edmonds to 'Barclay', 7 April 1950, Edmonds Papers, I/2B/5a.

<sup>3</sup>Barrow to Wavell, n.d., Allenby Papers, 6/III.



Charteris maintained, Haig believed he was 'the predestined' instrument of Providence for the achievement of victory'. The conception of himself as a 'child of destiny' made Haig 'genuinely convinced that the position to which he was called was one that he and he alone in the British Army could fill.'<sup>1</sup>

A well-functioning General Staff could have partially countered Haig's rigidity and aided his adjustment to this unique war. A proficient staff was especially important because static wars are by nature staff wars. Wellington did not need an efficient staff at Waterloo because the entire battlefield was within his field of vision. He was immediately aware of the effects of his orders. Like a puppeteer, he was omnipotent. In contrast, Haig had to control an army of two million men from an isolated chateau twenty-five miles from the front. A staff had three essential functions. The first was to communicate with the front, the second to provide intelligence on the enemy and the third to provide tactical insights based on the information from the first two areas. Haig fully understood these functions of the staff. A great part of his career was devoted to preparing men for them. But, especially with regard to the staff, there had always been in Haig a separation of principles and practice. A staff is only as effective as the commander wants it to be. In the case of Haig, it appears that personal characteristics rendered him, even before the war, incapable of benefitting fully from a modern, professional staff. Evidence from the war suggests that, at least until 1918, Haig was unable to abandon his preference for weak, servile staff officers. Both sides in the Haig argument agree that Haig's staff failed at its duties. It probably failed because Haig chose to command like Wellington.

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<sup>1</sup>Charteris, Field Marshal Earl Haig, pp. 180-181.

One very significant reason for the staff's difficulty with its first function was the impediment caused by Haig's extraordinarily high level of optimism. Optimism in wartime is essential, but it should not be unreasonable or blind, as it appears to have been with Haig. The effect of Haig's optimism was magnified by the high value which he gave to loyalty. A lack of optimism may have been equated with disloyalty, and thus a staff officer's status could have depended in part on his willingness to echo Haig's views of the war. At GHQ, a perception of the war developed which was increasingly divorced from reality. For instance, when presented with evidence of a counter-attack at Cambrai in late 1917:

Charteris refused to have these movements shown on the location map . . . saying he did not accept the evidence and in any case he did not want to weaken the C. in C.'s resolution . . .<sup>1</sup>

When maps from the Passchendaele front began to show the impossibility of conditions there, GHQ ordered that they no longer be sent.<sup>2</sup> The prison camp capers involving both Haig and Lloyd George have already been mentioned.

Lloyd George felt that examples such as those mentioned above were evidence of Haig's, and the staffs, almost criminal deception.<sup>3</sup> But Liddell Hart correctly perceives them as the pervasive effects of Haig's optimism. 'Good intentions', he wrote, 'paved the path to "Passchendaele"'.<sup>4</sup> Optimism became a staff policy from which diversion was inexcusable. Thus Haig reacted to the less sanguine information

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as a Military Commander, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup>This episode was first described in a letter from J. F. C. Fuller to The Spectator, 10 January 1958. Similar accusations are made by H. Gough in Soldiering On, (London: Arthur Barker, 1954), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>See Lloyd George, War Memoirs, pp. 1265, 1296-97, 1316, etc.

<sup>4</sup>Liddell Hart, Through the Fog of War, p. 55.



from the War Office Intelligence Chief (MacDonogh) by claiming that he received information from 'tainted sources'.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, Haig criticised a cavalry commander who had written a despondent letter to his wife by claiming that 'cavalry commanders above all . . . should be hopeful.' He continued by complaining

. . . how difficult it is even in the Army to make people realise how we are beating the Enemy, unless one is actually on the front where the battle is going on, and one can see the ground gained, state of enemy prisoners, etc. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Colonel Rankin, the cavalry commander in question, had in actuality spent more time at the front than Haig. But Haig had the benefit of his loyal staff, who fed him with the sort of information he wanted to hear. This level of optimism made for painful realisations when the actual war was occasionally revealed. Kiggell, the Chief of Staff, for instance, broke into tears when he saw the conditions at the front for the first time after the Flanders offensive of 1917.<sup>3</sup> While the staff can to some extent be blamed for their tendency to mislead Haig, it is indeed questionable whether Haig would have tolerated a staff officer who consistently supplied him with information which contradicted his sanguine preconceptions.

Haig can likewise be partially blamed for his staff's difficulties with its second responsibility, that of gathering intelligence. Charteris, Haig's Intelligence Officer until late 1917, has been . . . widely condemned for providing Haig with false or inaccurate informa-

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<sup>1</sup>See Diary, 15 October 1917: 'I cannot think why the War Office Intelligence Department gives such a wrong picture of the situation except that General MacDonogh is a Roman Catholic and is (perhaps unconsciously) influenced by information which reaches him from tainted (i.e. Catholic) sources.'

<sup>2</sup>Haig to Lady Haig, 13 August 1917, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 147.

<sup>3</sup>Liddell Hart first disclosed this information in The Spectator, 1 March 1958.

tion. He has, more than any other staff officer, been the 'scapegoat for what the Haig proponents see as the few faults of Haig's command. But the intelligence reports which are available suggest that Charteris was surprisingly proficient at gathering information on the enemy, given his lack of experience in this field. He consistently provided accurate estimates of German strength and numbers, and was adept at guessing enemy intentions. For instance, he predicted exactly when, where and how the 1918 offensive would materialise.<sup>1</sup> There were, admittedly, serious problems with the intelligence supplied to Haig. These lay in the nature of the information gathered and in the interpretations given to this information. Intelligence staff are supposed to collect hard evidence of enemy strengths and weaknesses, and clues to future intentions. This is the information which is most helpful to offensive and defensive planning. As indicated above, Charteris skilfully supplied data of this sort. Unfortunately, this was not the only area which received his attention. A large amount of his time was also spent analysing the state of German morale. Enemy morale is usually the concern of propagandists. It is a subjective concept which is extremely difficult to measure and understand. Morale factors should not ordinarily be used in the formation of offensive policy, as they appear to have been during Haig's command.

Haig assumed that victory would come with the collapse of German morale. He was, in a sense, right. But, as was the case in South Africa and the Sudan, the importance which Haig gave to morale factors caused him to look too enthusiastically for evidence of emotional deterioration. For instance, he regularly visited prisoner of war camps to inspect the German captives. He naturally found emotional

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<sup>1</sup>See 'Notes on German Intentions', compiled by J. Charteris, contained in Haig War Diary, following entry for 6 December 1917, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc. 3155, No. 120.



wrecks who confirmed his preconceptions. Charteris sifted 'through captured soldiers' letters in a diligent search for evidence of despondency or pessimism. He too found what he wanted. He also kept a running account of the food value of the rations given to the German soldiers in the trenches. He recorded evidence of malnutrition long before there was any noticeable diminution in the fighting value of those troops. The intelligence staff apparently tried to show not simply how the Germans could be beaten, but also attempted to demonstrate that they were beaten. The latter would have become obvious when it became a fact. The data on morale factors diminished the value of more accurate findings on enemy strengths and intentions. GHQ appears to have had a false conception of the state of the German Army and Nation. From early 1916, victory was assumed to be simply around the corner. This meant that, in strategic planning, emphasis was placed on a knockout blow--an impossibility until late in the war.<sup>1</sup>

The staff did not offer tactical insights (the third function) because Haig apparently did not want assistance of this type. His belief that he alone knew the right way seems to have precluded his seeking advice on tactics. The staff's responsibility was mainly administrative. 'In many ways D.H. is his own Chief of Staff', Charteris wrote. 'His Chief of Staff has little to do except to see that things go smoothly.'<sup>2</sup> Esher praised Haig in a similar manner, by claiming that Haig's General Staff was

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Davidson, Haig's Chief of Operations, admitted in Haig: Master of the Field, p. 32, that because of faulty advice from his Army Commanders and inaccurate intelligence, Haig conducted the entire Flanders Offensive of 1917 with the emphasis firmly upon a breakthrough and knockout blow.

<sup>2</sup>Charteris, At G.H.Q., p. 74.

. . . an excellent machine, formed to carry out his ideas and intentions. They intitiate nothing. All initiative remains with him.<sup>1</sup>

This appears to have been the arrangement which Haig wanted. As Terraine maintains, despite the inadequacies of the senior staff officers, 'it is wrong to assert . . . that Haig was a bad judge of men.'<sup>2</sup> His rise in the Army was aided by his astute ability to recognise men of value to him professionally. In the same way, he quite intentionally chose a staff composed of men of 'average intelligence' who could be trusted to be loyal and supportive—a 'band of brothers' united against outside interference. It is probably not a coincidence that the only senior staff officer who was in any way forced upon Haig (Herbert Lawrence) also turned out to be the most strong-willed, independent and effective one. While it is impossible to generalise about the characters of every staff officer, it does seem true that the men closest to Haig (and those who would have had the greatest effect upon him) were above all subservient, pedantic, unimaginative and, as Terraine rightly argues, 'too much in awe of papa'.<sup>3</sup>

The staff seems to have conformed to Haig's rigid preconceptions regarding the war when it should have acted as an inspired body capable of helping him to adjust to the very difficult challenges which he faced. This result is understandable when Haig's pre-war character and attitudes toward the staff are considered. The staff's deficiencies were doubly unfortunate since Haig had many of the qualities essential to effective leadership. He was determined, devoted, courageous and self-confident. He looked and acted like a

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<sup>1</sup>Viscount Reginald Esher, Journals and Letters, (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1938), Vol. IV, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



leader. He knew how to inspire his men and somehow enabled them to remain confident of victory. He was also an efficient organiser and administrator--essential qualities in this war of million-man armies. But, instead of enhancing these qualities, the staff seems to have exacerbated his negative characteristics. They appear to have fueled his optimism, encouraged his sense of omnipotence and failed to counter his rigidity.

The personal factors affecting Haig's command and his choice of a staff, indicate that his character, more than any other factor, prevented him from becoming the type of commander ideally suited to this type of war. In answer to statements of this type, Haig's proponents often argue that he was the 'best of the bunch'--that no one else was better suited for chief command. This statement is probably true, but there are limitations to its significance. One such limitation lies in the meaning of the word best, a difficult term to define in relation to the Victorian Army, in which there was little consideration of fitting the right man into the right job. Promotion in this Army was based on vague and general appraisals of the officer's qualities; the criteria used often had little to do with his fitness for wartime command. Haig was definitely the 'best' soldier in December 1915, but this meant that he was the best according to Victorian standards, not necessarily the best for chief command in this particular war. He would perhaps have been more successful as an Army Commander, Quartermaster General or Chief of Staff--in other words, any position in which leadership and administrative skills were more important than tactical prowess. Haig became the 'best' soldier because his administrative skills were highly relevant at a time when the Army was badly in need of organisational reform. Unfortunately, he became Commander-in-Chief when the Army most needed a

tactician.

Another limitation to the statement that Haig was the best of the bunch is that the bunch was a decidedly poor lot. Thus, the argument over Haig's relative quality in fact goes a long way toward explaining his absolute inadequacy. The British Army was the stratified product of a stratified society. Only a certain type joined, and only an even more select type was promoted to high command. The possibilities for variation on the Haig theme were not wide. Repington and Fuller are two examples of independently-minded officers who failed to realise their full potential because they did not conform to the status quo. A criticism of Haig is therefore inevitably a criticism of this Army. It was an army which for years had been geared toward the production of omnipotent commanders for Victoria's small wars. The Army was isolated from public examination and from the military developments in the rest of the world. Some of the faults of the system were exposed in South Africa. After the Boer War, changes were made. The Army began to come to terms with the twentieth century. But many of her senior officers found it difficult to abandon traditional habits. An example of the unsteady and lengthy process of modernisation is Haig, who espoused many of the new trends, but had problems applying them to himself or understanding their manifold implications. After the Boer War the British Army needed most what she could not have: time. She needed time to clear the system of men whose minds were mired in the past.

For thirty years Haig prepared for a type of war which never came. It is unreasonable to expect that he, or anyone, should have been fully ready for the Great War, which surprised nearly everyone. It is not unreasonable to expect someone in his position to have adjusted once the character of the war became clear. It is in adjusting that



Haig seems to have been most inadequate. A detailed study of Haig's conduct in the Great War, following from the findings of this thesis, would probably support the allegation of his inability to adapt. It would probably support the premise that Haig's development as a soldier was virtually complete by 1914, and that he did not, or could not, significantly alter his attitudes and habits after that time. It would probably also show that Haig succeeded in war by following virtually the same course which brought success in the pre-war Army. Ambition, determination, confidence and an unquestioning devotion to traditional military principles; not brilliance, imagination, flexibility or creativity; brought professional advancement and victory in battle. In the end, Haig won. But by 1918, victory was not the simple concept it had been in 1897 or 1902. When Britain became a people at war instead of, simply, an army at war, there arose a corresponding change of values, a change in the definition of victory. Costs had to be considered.

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